

A SPLENDID GOTIST



BY
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THAT GIRL FROM TEXAS

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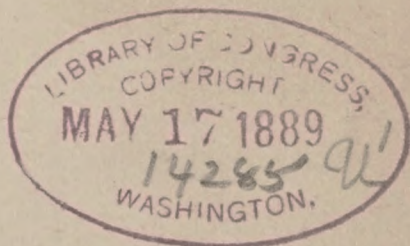
A SPLENDID EGOTIST

A NOVEL.

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AUTHOR OF

"THAT GIRL FROM TEXAS," "THE BAR SINISTER,"
"THE NEW MAN AT ROSSMERE," ETC.



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BELFORD, CLARKE & COMPANY,
PUBLISHERS.

LONDON: J. H. DRANE, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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A SPLENDID EGOTIST.

CHAPTER I.

“WHEN the June meadows grow gay with buttercups, daisies, and sweet red clover ; when sky, earth, and water emerge from the thralldom of winter, pranked out in blues and greens so exceedingly fresh and bright that one naturally fails to recognize them for the same old garments nature has worn since the garden of Eden times, the average man begins to draw disparaging comparisons between town and country, and would gladly resolve himself into a brown or yellow butterfly, with no more onerous duty to discharge than an occasional flight from the crown of a clover head to the golden cavern of a buttercup.

“For present purposes, I choose to classify you with the average man. Slough the sculptor and come up and turn butterfly for a few days. Metaphorically speaking only, for I can't imagine you divested of your excessively long legs and broad shoulders, nor yet conceive of any enjoyment for you in sucking red clover tops. Give me a good Havana always. Seriously, Lidy and I want you—need you, I might say, without

dropping into exaggeration. We are tiring of each other at a fearful rate. Come and take your choice of entertainments. You can go with me and fling a line for black-fish; sprawl at leisure under the laburnums on the fresh-clipped lawn, with only your pipe or cigar for company (taking your chances, of course, of ants and malaria), or, again, you can sit on the veranda and talk art with Lidy. She considers herself no end of a critic since her return from abroad, and imposes on me most outrageously with her 'tones' and 'semi-tones,' and heaven knows what bosh besides. Come up and protect us against each other. No excuse accepted.

“Yours,

“FOSTER.”

“That's kind of Foster. Tremendous effort too. He's about the laziest man I know. They are people it won't do to slight. Old family. Good position. No end of money. Entertain extensively, I hear, when they are in town.”

With these prefatory remarks, Mr. Randall Mac-kaye, sculptor, tossed the above letter into his wife's lap, and leaving his seat at the breakfast-table began a zig-zag journey about his studio. Evidently he was suffering from acute mental indecision. He would let Marianne decide for him. He had gone to numberless dinners and suppers in town without her; and had obtained a footing in some fine houses where her existence was not even suspected. But he had never deliberately gone off into the country to pay a visit of days and left her alone in the stuffy little studio which was all the home they had.

All the same, he should like very much to accept Foster's invitation. He stopped in front of her when he saw that she was putting the letter neatly back in its envelope, to say :

"Well?"

"Who is Lidy?" she asked.

"Foster's wife, I imagine. I have never met her. Some of the fellows at the Academy told me he had a wife studying in Berlin."

"Studying what?"

"Oh, music and painting and all the rest of it. The story goes that she is young and handsome, but never had much of a show before Foster married her. If I find she is one of your sort, I'll ask her to come and see you—that is—"

"You are going, then?"

"For a day or two. Don't you think it best? The Fosters are good people. Best not slight their first invitation."

"Best not," she had said too, and had taken considerable interest in helping to get him off on this visit to the Fosters.

"You are not to speak of me to the Fosters, Ran. You know our understanding. I am to remain *inconnu* until I can take my proper place among your fashionable friends without putting you and myself both to the blush. Use these rich stepping-stones to the best of your ability, dear."

Then she had given him a good-bye kiss, and had even followed him with her eyes as long as she could see him through the bowed shutters of the studio window, into which came all the clamorous town noises

and the heated outside air from which Ran was joyously escaping for a little while.

She watched him until he was swallowed up among the tree-trunks and the iron benches in the public square on which the studio fronted, then sent her imagination so swiftly in advance of him that she had located him under his friend's laburnums, and was anxiously speculating on his chances of malaria, before he had mounted the steps to the Elevated station which was to be the first stage of his journey Fosterward.

She stood still for awhile, gathering herself together, after the unusual hurry and rush of Ran's early departure. Somehow there always seemed a tremendous waste of energy incident upon Ran's social movements, and his exodus generally left her a trifle flustered.

The square beyond the bowed shutters was green with the first tender foliage of the early summer time. Baby perambulators, with their gay canopies of crimson or blue, made bright spots of color here and there, where their white-capped attendants had stopped to exchange greetings, or to improvise flirtations with the bench loafers. A weary tramp was sitting on the curb near the drinking fountain, eating the breakfast he had secured at the cost of so many steps, from a greasy newspaper ; a pair of English sparrows were twittering and hopping about his shabby feet, watching for such crumbs as might fall from his grimy fingers ; a brewer wagon, piled toppling high with empty kegs, thundered by, making the earth tremble. "A blot upon the landscape," she called it, then fell, woman-like, to uselessly moralizing over the sorrow and misery that those kegs,

when full, had been the occasion of. A wheezing hand-organ stopped immediately under the window, and began grinding out the "Red, White, and Blue." She shuddered, clasped her hands to her ears, and, turning away from the window, found herself face to face with all the rude litter of a sculptor's studio.

"I wonder what he means by one of my sort." She started from her long reverie, and walking to the remote end of the studio, she lifted the shroud from an unfinished statue, and was soon obliviously absorbed in scanning it. An astute looker-on would have experienced no difficulty in determining that the living woman had furnished the model for the unfinished work of art before which she stood, with her hands dropped listlessly in front of her while engaged in the critic's task.

Not worded criticism. There was no one present to be benefited or exasperated by her cool, keen strictures upon the statue, which already faithfully outlined her own delicate, clean-cut profile, doing full justice to the supporting column of throat and slim neck so admirably poised. Ran said she "lent herself splendidly to marble."

"He works slowly," she said, aloud, after a long while; "very slowly. He will never finish it at this rate. Ah, if he were only more industrious, more systematic!"

Her survey concluded, she replaced the sheet and turned her attention to the room, whose frightful disorder had extracted one or two impatient exclamations from her before she had unveiled the statue. There was a tiger's skin on the floor, its glaring eyes and vicious teeth rendered somewhat ineffective at that

particular juncture by the enveloping folds of a bright scarlet jacket, which had either tumbled off a chair near by, or been flung on the rug when discarded by its wearer. There was a crimson fez on the chair cushion ; and a paper of spilt cigarette-tobacco littered the centre-table. There was a pile of rough drafts of statues scattered about among the books and the tobacco. Wild disorder everywhere ! Ran had looked back over his shoulder with a laugh, as he congratulated her on this “rare chance among the rubbish.”

Her white brows contracted in a frown as she recalled his airy words and smile.

“If there was a hook on every inch of the walls, Ran would leave me something to pick up after him.”

The stooping for the silken jacket, or vexation at the selfish carelessness of its owner, flushed her face. She looked much less like the statue after her ivory-smooth cheeks had become blood-stained. Less statuesque, but vastly handsomer.

She disappeared behind a heavy portiere with the jacket and a pair of embroidered slippers, which came to light on smoothing out the afghan on the sofa. The portieres made a small separate compartment in one corner of the immense studio, and behind them she carried on that make-shift domestic economy called “light housekeeping.” When she once more emerged, the last vestige of likeness to the veiled statue had been obliterated.

A coarse linen apron had been drawn over her dress and pinned to the shoulders. An old brown-gauze veil was tied carefully over her hair. She was pardonably proud of her hair, and the marble chips and dust upon

which she was going to wage a war of extermination would not improve its glossy softness. In her hands were a broom, dust-pan, and duster. In her soul was a determination to "make a day of it" among the piles of broken plaster casts, heaps of artistic rubbish, and lurking dust-holes which will accumulate around most men.

There was no carpet on the marquette floor, only a multiplicity of rugs, most of them ghastly-looking skins of wild beasts who had escaped decapitation. As an initial step in this crusade against disorder, she gathered these into a large armful, and, going towards the door, was about to precipitate them into the corridor, when she recoiled suddenly from, and was recoiled from with equal suddenness by, a person without.

"Hold!" The command was given almost hysterically.

Two delicate tan gloves were raised deprecatingly, and across the grinning masks of the defunct tigers, bears, and wolves the house-cleaner stared into the dancing eyes of an extremely handsome young woman, who stood before her, arrayed from hat to boots with a modest daintiness quite in keeping with those protesting suédes. Both women laughed at the thought of what might have happened, after which the crusader apologized politely.

"Don't speak of it," her visitor said, fervently. "I am only too thankful to escape death by suffocation." Suddenly dropping the ineffectual barriers she had raised against the wild beasts, she asked:

"Is not this Mr. Mackaye's studio? Mr. Mackaye, the sculptor?"

“Yes ; but he is out.”

“I know that. ‘Out’ stared me in the face from the card-rack in the hall downstairs. That is exactly why I kept on up.”

She laughed easily, after the manner of women conscious of fine teeth, and stepping across the pile of rugs, which now lay on the floor of the corridor, she invaded the denuded studio uninvited. Once inside she took possession of the most comfortable chair in sight, and resting her small gloved hands on its arms, calmly gazed about her with bright, interested eyes.

“But Mr. Mackaye is out for some days,” the house-cleaner said, looking rather disapprovingly down at the self-possessed young woman in the big chair. “Perhaps he will not be home until after a late dinner on Thursday.”

“Gone with the Murrays on their yacht?”

The invader asked this question, with her pretty head held bird-wise.”

“No, not with the Murrays. Did you want to leave an order?”

The girl in the chair laughed again lightly, and, springing nimbly to her feet, laid her delicate gloves softly on the coarse brown linen that protected the questioner’s waist.

“My good girl, see here. By-the-way,” questioningly, “are you the person who has charge of Mr. Mackaye’s studio?”

The heart beneath that coarse linen apron gave a fierce bound, then as suddenly resumed its calm, even pulsations. It might lose Ran a lucrative order if this fashionable dame should suspect she was talking to

Mrs. Randall Mackaye. People judged so superficially, that to find the artist's wife doing menial service would be an advertisement of the artist's penury.

"Yes," she said, quietly, nothing remaining of her anger but a spot of red on either cheek-bone, "I am the person who cares for this studio."

"And see him often, of course?"

"Pretty often. He's out a good deal. Mr. Mackaye, I suppose you mean, by he?"

"Now, see here, my good girl; I hope you are discreet."

"I try to be."

"That's right, and rest assured you shan't lose anything by being so with me. I am dying to see something in Mr. Mackaye's studio—something he is at work on. But, of course, he is not to know anything about my being here, you know."

"Then he did not ask you to come?"

"No, oh no! this is a little lark of my own devising. That's horridly slangy, but true, none the less."

"And you are not afraid of his being angry?"

The laugh with which the girl received this suggestion was so full of airy confidence that Randall Mackaye's wife writhed fiercely under it for a full second before she said:

"The idea seems to amuse you."

"It does," said the girl, with another insolent little laugh; "we are such very good friends, you know."

The next moment she was on her feet, moving eagerly towards the veiled statue. "It must be under there."

"Why not wait until he is ready to exhibit his work?"

“That will be forever. He says I must wait until it is put on exhibition at the Academy of Design. But that isn’t fair.”

She was standing by the statue now, but between her and it stood the other woman, stately, determined, immovable; only the spot of red on her ivory cheeks and the kindling of her grave eyes telling of the inward tumult.

“Not fair to whom?”

“To me.”

“Why should you be favored beyond the general public?”

“Because—because—I know all about it.” This with the most delicious flush and a knowing nod of her pretty head. “I am *it*—you know. I—inspired it—you see.”

“Oh!” from Marianne.

“Yes, and I know what it is going to be called—and—you see,” explanatorily, “Mr. Mackaye and I are the best friends in the world.”

“Yes?”

“Yes, and—and I know the lady whose features he is reproducing in ‘Love’s Young Dream.’ That is what he is going to call it. The statue, I mean.”

“You know the lady?”

“Yes. Very—very—well indeed.”

There was no misreading the glow of personal vanity gratified, in the bright upturned face before her. Mrs. Mackaye turned from that illumined face to shake some marble dust from the folds of the white cloth that shrouded the statue, but made no motion to lift it. She hoped her own face did not tell its tale as plainly as did

that girl's. There was a soft metallic click as the young lady opened and closed her pocket-book. Then she laid one little gloved hand, with a bill crumpled in its palm, persuasively on Mrs. Mackaye's:

"My good girl, just one little peep. He will never know it. I should not dare acknowledge it. He might think it fast, you know."

The sculptor's wife was calmly smoothing the bank-bill out in the palm of her left hand.

"What is this for?" she asked, dully.

"For you."

"For me?"

"Yes"—her visitor was waxing petulant—"for you. To pay you for just lifting a corner of that cloth and letting me have one little look at the statue. If I knew how, I'd do it myself, but I am afraid I might break something."

"So am I."

"But you have seen him do it. I am sure you must have."

"Yes, I have seen him at work on it. But I am afraid too."

"No harm shall come to you."

"That sounds potential."

"I am potential," with another rippling laugh, whose cool insolence sent the hot blood seething and dancing through Marianne Mackaye's veins in a perfect lava-flood of passion.

"I am afraid," she said, very slowly, waiting until she was quite sure of her voice, "that I shall have to ask you to go away now. I am not at liberty to show any of Mr. Mackaye's work to strangers, and I must take

this chance to give his studio a good overhauling. He does not often admit strangers to this room, even when he's at home."

"But I tell you I am not a stranger. I am his very, very best friend. And—and—he'll never, never know I've been here. Not from me."

"Nor from me," said Marianne, slowly. "Please go now. I could not tell him if I wanted to; I don't know who you are."

Her visitor turned away with an irritated laugh. "You are horrid." Then, with a swirl of silken draperies, she faced towards the statue once more.

"I will make it ten."

"Make what ten?"

"I will pay you ten dollars and insure you against the wrath to come."

"That I am quite sure you could not do." Marianne slowly opened her hand and let the forgotten bill fall on the floor between them. "I am sorry to seem unaccommodating to so generous a young lady, but as long as Mr. Mackaye's studio is in my charge, things must not be touched. Won't you be so good as to go away now?"

"You are simply abominable."

"Yes."

There seemed nothing left to be said or done on either side. The visitor turned away, with a scowl on her pretty face, and began coolly making the circuit of the studio. She would beat no hasty retreat before this incorruptible dragon in the coarse apron and bandaged head. It was humiliating to be thwarted by one of "that class." Usually it was easy enough to buy concessions from them. All this before she had reached

the door by which she had entered. There she came to an abrupt pause, and made a little exclamation of delight.

"I did not know he painted too! These are divine." She touched three unframed pictures successively with the ferule of her lace-trimmed parasol.

"I think he does not lay much stress on those little things," Marianne said, sending her voice coldly across the room from where she still stood by the veiled image. "They are mere stop-gaps."

"Stop-gaps? Oh, yes. What the artists call pot-boilers. Poor, dear old fellow!"

Her voice had died away into a sort of coo. No ear less keenly attent than a jealous woman's could have caught those last few words. With them, the girl laid her hand on the knob of the door and passed out into the corridor, with no word of farewell for the "incorruptible dragon" who stood pale and still beside the veiled statue.

An irrepressible impulse carried Marianne swiftly back toward the studio window. She was just in time to see the shining door of a shining coupé open and engulf Ran's vanquished visitor. A footman in buff tights took the adventurous young woman's orders through the door, before springing nimbly to his place by the side of a red-faced coachman, similarly attired. Four top-boots were planted immovably against the shining dash-board, and, with a flash of silver-plated harness and a clatter of high-stepping hoofs, the girl who had proclaimed herself the sculptor's "very best friend" to the sculptor's wife was whirled out of sight.

"And to think," said Marianne, "that I do not even know who she is!"

CHAPTER II.

RETURNING home between the reasonable hours of eleven and twelve o'clock, a few nights later on, Randall Mackaye inserted his latch-key in the key-hole of the studio with premeditated softness. It had occurred to him, while feeling in his vest pocket for it, not to arouse his wife by any undue boisterousness in the matter of finding his way through the crowded studio.

"Poor little woman! It has been a long, stupid time to her, I guess. Better let her sleep it off."

What the *it* was which Mr. Mackaye preferred his wife should sleep off he did not formulate very precisely, even to his conscience. He fitted the latch-key with unusual gentleness and opened the door with a cautious movement, which under some circumstances might have suggested apprehension. But he was duly sober, and, besides, his Marianne was no shrew.

He gave an exclamation of pleased surprise on entering the dimly lighted room. His artistic perceptions had been most unexpectedly gratified. In the cushioned window-seat which filled the broad space in front of the large, double, front window, Marianne was curled up in a position so admirably adapted to a sculptor's purposes that it must have been premeditated, he thought. Leaning on the elbow, which rested on the stone sill of the window, with her gaze turned outward and upward; her pure profile cast into clear prominence by the cluster

of electric lights caught midway between heaven and earth out there in the square; the loose folds of her white wrapper sweeping the floor about her, she sat in seeming unconsciousness of his entrance, until he had crossed the room, tossed his hat and light top-coat into a corner, and coming over to her had lifted one of the long heavy plaits of hair which fell over her shoulders, arranged for the night, and carried it gallantly to his lips.

“You beautiful witch, what do you mean by sitting here, posing for a statue of Reverie at this hour of the night?”

He held the long soft plait of shining hair in his hand, as he bent over to kiss her on the forehead. His breath was hot and vinous, and the odor of dead cigars clung to his mustache. She shrank from him involuntarily and made a fleeting repelling gesture with her slim white hand, as she turned her searching eyes on his face.

“As you please, my lady fair.” He flung the shining plait of hair from him with petulant impatience. “You know I’m not much of a beggar in that line. The next kiss, I imagine, will be a free-will offering on your side.”

Marianne rose slowly to her feet. All the hot, seething, angry speculations which had made the last two days a period of prolonged pain culminated in a bit of commonplace at which she could not help smiling in bitter irony.

“Shall I get you something to eat, Ran?”

It showed the force of habit. She had been accustomed to place his physical necessities among matters of the very first importance.

He waived the suggestion aside with the airy contempt of a man who had been unusually well fed for a few days.

"Thanks, no. I am not always thinking of the inner man. Been lonely, Nan-nan?"

The easiest chair in the room was drawn up in front of the window seat, and by it was a table with his smoking apparatus and a bottle of Apollinaris water, with glass all ready to his hand. He flung himself into the chair, and without pressing an answer to his last question, he poured himself out a glass of the mineral water, which he drank off at a breath.

"Any letters, papers, visitors? Anything at all happened since I left?"

He was wiping the Apollinaris from the silken tips of his long mustache, while trying to read the inscrutable young face before him. There was a low lamp on the table, over whose globe a rose-colored shade had been drawn. His wife had seated herself again on his refusal of refreshment, but remained strangely silent. It was not like her to "sulk." He had never known her to do such a thoroughly commonplace thing.

It was she who was always urging his acceptance of invitations from the people of wealth and fashion who had "heard of him." It was she who was always telling him that "people must become personally interested in him, the man, before they would cordially recognize his work as an artist." And she had sent him off on that very visit to the Fosters in the best possible humor. She was uncommonly unlike herself to-night.

"Confound that red shade;" he twitched the offend-

ing bit of tissue-paper from the globe and cast it from him ; "it makes you look ghastly."

"Red does not usually have that effect," said Marianne, putting up a white hand between her eyes and the sudden glare of gas. Her eyes were red and swollen, a fact which she preferred not to disclose.

"You look ghastlier than ever !" her husband said, testily, in offended tones.

"Do I? Then you had better put back the shade. Yes, something has happened, to answer one of your questions."

She left him in suspense while she made the circuit of the long room to fetch from behind the portieres a red woollen cape, which she threw over her thinly-clad shoulders. The cape was tied about her throat by a satin ribbon when she once more seated herself in front of him, and its floating ends gave inexhaustible occupation to her restless fingers.

"Well, what?" with boyish impatience.

Either she had changed her mind since going for the wrap, or she was bent upon the trivial to-night.

"I have given the studio a splendid overhauling. You know I told you I was going to devote the time to it."

"And have simply worked yourself down. If women would only recognize the fact that it is as much their duty to look beautiful for their husbands as it is to attend to their creature comforts, it would be a deucedly good thing all round."

"And I have made a discovery, Randall," Marianne went on, passing silently over this aggrieved truism.

"Well?"

"I have discovered that your masterpiece is not

getting on very fast. I expended half of one of my long hours criticising 'Love's Young Dream' this morning."

"Yes? Of course you found no end of fault with it." He stood somewhat in awe of Marianne as an art critic. She was both true and fearless.

"As a work of art? No."

"I did not know it was open to criticism on any other score. As a likeness, perhaps? If you go on losing flesh at the rate you have done lately, we'll both find it hard to see the model in it."

"Why don't you work harder on it, Randall? harder and faster? Why do you let days and days go by without ever even looking at the work which you say is to bring you fame and fortune? How can you be satisfied to see it standing there shrouded day after day, weeks and months rolling by, and it no nearer completion?"

She had never before reproached him, laggard that he was. She had been content to work for him, in her way; to save for him, manage for him, to ward off, as far as possible, all the sordid considerations of their everyday needs, so that he could have all the more freedom of mind and body to devote to his masterpiece.

She recalled how she had flushed with pride on that morning, so long gone now, when he had broached to her the inception of this great work of art, which was to startle an admiring world into an attitude of worship for his genius. She did not lose sight of possibly accruing gain therefrom. Her whole life had been one of practical endeavor. She had managed and pinched and manœuvred for Randall, just as she had managed and pinched and manœuvred for her father, the impecunious portrait-painter who had been Ran-

all's first instructor. But she hoped great things from this masterpiece.

She had thrilled with gratified pride when Randall had said, in tones of positive conviction, "that nowhere in the wide world might he hope to find so perfect a model for his masterpiece as in his own beautiful Marianne." And so the statue had seemed to be almost a part of herself. She had never discussed it cold-bloodedly before. If it had taken her twenty-two years of unconscious industry to achieve such a degree of physical perfection as was hers, why should she expect Ran to produce its duplicate with a blow or two of his hammer and chisel? She had often laughed at her own silent reasoning on this point, and had possessed her soul in patience.

But that had all been before a strange woman, smooth of cheek and bright of eye, had come into the quiet studio and left behind her such a horrible pain and cruel suspicion—a suspicion which she hated so to put into words.

The shame of it was too great. Careless, selfish, egotistical. All these, in bitter self-communion, she had admitted "Ran might be." But a deliberate lie! A lie, if not to her, to that "girl." Could he be guilty of it? She was suddenly consumed by a fierce impatience to have him finish his work and put it before the world. Then that other woman, the woman who had made the time of Ran's absence a time of torture such as she hoped never to experience again, would stand self-accused of monstrous vanity. She had reasoned it all out from a wife's standpoint, and the result was, strange to say, in Randall's favor.

Perhaps he had made some flattering speech to a silly girl, and the visit of the other morning had been the result. She would not tell him of that importunate visitor.

"Yes, Ran," she said, once more, with a ring of irritated impatience altogether novel in his experience, "why don't you work at your statue steadily, finish it, and put it on exhibition? You must do it, Randall."

"D——d if that isn't just like a woman! Nag at a man to send him in one direction, and then fly at him like a fury because he doesn't go just exactly in the opposite direction. Egad, it's maddening!"

He sprang from the easy-chair and began pacing the studio with that long stride of his which Marianne always said suggested boundless stretches of breezy moorland to be gotten over.

"Who was it that urged me to accept that invitation to the Fosters?" he stopped in front of her to ask.

"I did."

"Who is it that is always saying, 'You must become personally known, and that among the wealthy classes, if you ever hope to make a support out of your chisel for yourself and me'?"

"I said it."

"Who is it," going on with his fierce catechism and his fierce pedestrianism, "that is always saying, 'You must go out where you can see beautiful things. Go where works of art are to be examined. Mingle with people who know art, love art, exalt art; are rich enough to patronize art'?"

"I. I plead guilty to every indictment."

"Well, then, what is a fellow to do?"

Either he was physically exhausted, or the puerility

of his own arguments struck him with such force just here as to cause him to sit down suddenly and fall to mopping his forehead with a white-silk handkerchief, which Marianne recognized, with a sickening sensation of surprise, exhaled the same faint perfume of heliotrope which had stifled her when Ran's visitor was in the studio.

She was sorry she had not borne in mind the irritating effect of a single glass of wine on her husband. It had been better not to have broached the subject of the statue at all to-night, but she could not leave it just where it was. Having said anything at all she must say more.

"I did not mean to anger you, Randall, but I feel that I have a right to urge you to devote a little more time to a piece of work which promises so much, you know."

"Oh! I know everything. I know that because I chanced to leave you alone for a few days you grew cross and morbid, and have been bottling up your spite to pour it out on my head as a sort of counter-irritant. It might have marred all my chances of successful drudgery in the future to have had an entirely pleasant visit among cultivated and amiable people, and then come home to an amiable wife to finish out the evening in quiet talk, you know. Egad! when I opened that door and saw you sitting there looking so serene and pretty, my heart gave a great leap for very tenderness, and I said to myself, she's the very pearl of wives, waiting up to finish off the evening so nicely. I saw you were sulking about something as soon as I spoke to you. It puzzled me at first. But I see now, you're thinking

that, when the statue is done, should I ever acknowledge that my wife furnished the model, people would laugh at the idea."

"Then," she said, standing up before him with tightly clasped hands, "you will have to transfer the honor to some other woman."

He laughed mirthlessly: "That's an easy thing to do, but so long as I am hampered as I am, it's not likely it ever will be finished."

"Hampered, Randall?"

All the pain and the injustice and the brutality that had been crowded into that hour seemed as idle as the wind by comparison with that crowning piece of barbarous injustice.

"Yes, hampered."

He repeated the word waveringly, then striding away from the possibility of a retort, entered their sleeping-room and slammed the door after him.

CHAPTER III.

“HAMPERED !”

The word repeated itself with galling persistency. There was no ridding herself of the sound of it, as it had come with rasping harshness from her husband's lips. It haunted her that night, as she sat there, white, still, and cold, listening to Randall's rather boisterous preparations for retiring. She could not recall ever having seen him in quite such a rage. It haunted her long after she had put away the tray and pushed back the easy-chair and arranged the sofa-bed with mechanical precision for her own uneasy slumbers. It haunted her the next morning when she prepared Ran's breakfast, with delicate skill, and left it on the gas-stove to keep warm until he should choose to dispose of it.

Her own was a matter of small moment. She hurried through with it, and seated herself before an easel on which a small figure-piece stood. It was in a nearly finished state when she sat down to it, and it had progressed by a whole hour's steady application when the chamber door, which Mr. Mackaye had slammed with such masculine and unnecessary vigor at the time of his violent exodus the night previous, opened to admit him to the studio. With his advent there came a refreshing suggestion of perfumed soaps, good cologne, and cool morning attire deliberately donned.

He was a luxurious animal, this Washington Square sculptor, and never found himself in such mental or emotional straits as to affect the careful paring of his polished nails, or the studied arrangement of his elegant side-whiskers. He came into the studio that morning amiably minded to obliterate all memory of the previous evening's unpleasantness by a forgiving kiss. "It was not often," he reminded himself, while adjusting his flesh-white necktie, "that 'Nan-nan' was so trying."

Marianne drew her brush somewhat wildly across the surface of her palette, mixing her pigments recklessly, as he came across the studio and, standing behind her, laid his cool, fresh hands caressingly on her shoulders.

It was an invitation, but she did not accept it. She turned her head neither to the right nor to the left. She could see the long acorn nails, shell-tinted and smooth, with their carefully preserved crowns, out of the corners of her drooping eyes. All the reds in her paint-box seemed transferred to her cheeks. Randall could feel her trembling under his hands. "What an inconveniently intense creature she is!"

"When the masterpiece is done," he said, breaking the awkward silence, during which a kiss of reconciliation had been tacitly offered and tacitly rejected, "I shall insist upon your giving up this job-work, 'Nan-nan.' Those pretty little trifles of yours are catch-penny affairs, which appeal to the uneducated fancy of the herd, but you can scarcely take much satisfaction in them yourself."

"Not a great deal. But they serve as stop-gaps, you know, and we are not independent of them as yet."

“Not yet. And if they serve to amuse you—well. As for me, I don’t care to prostitute genius at such a ruinous price. For instance, what do you expect for that trifle? A sketchy, nice little thing, upon my word. You have talent, Nan, undoubted talent.”

“Fifteen dollars!” said Marianne, laconically. His tones and the subject-matter of them grated harshly on her overwrought nerves. One voluntary word of manly, sincere regret for his brutality of the night before, and all might have been well. As it was, he only strengthened her resolution to ask him a very serious question as soon as he should have breakfasted. All the conditions must be favorable to him.

“You are coming with me?” he said, turning from her with a frown, at her suggestion that he had better take his breakfast.

“No; it is all ready to your hand. I must finish this to-day. It goes with the other three. The man will be here for them at half-past ten.”

“You had better have worked on them, then, while I was out of the way. You would have been better employed than moping yourself into such a deuced fit of the sulks.”

She saved her reply to this unnecessary fling until he came back from behind the portieres, after his solitary breakfast.

“Now a cigar, and then for a good day’s work on ‘Love’s Young Dream.’ I will show you what a good boy I can be when I want to be.”

She laid down her work-tools and came over to him, standing before him pale and resolute.

“Ran, I think love’s young dream must be pretty

well over between man and wife when such passages as last night's are possible. Don't you?"

He looked at her darkly over the flame of the match he was holding to his cigar; but she was not to be deterred from her fixed purpose by the threat of an eye or the angry red of a man's cheek.

"I don't care to have you say you did not mean a word that you said last night, Ran," she went on, quietly; "for no one ever does mean half they say in temper. But you made use of one word, Ran, yes, and you repeated it, which you must take back before things can be as they were with us."

"Must take back! You take lofty grounds, Mrs. Mackaye."

He was sitting below her now, with his handsome head thrown back against the crimson plush head-rest, which she had bound with gay ribbon bows about the back of his bent-wood chair. The smoke from his cigar curled toward the ceiling, making a thin blue veil between her and the mocking devil in his splendid eyes.

"I take just grounds, Randall. You don't know how hard it is for me to bring up that hateful discussion again. If you did, you would understand my underlying purpose better."

"I take it that nothing is easier for some women than to nurse a grievance. Your underlying purpose, I imagine, is to extract from me an abject admission of remorse for my recent pleasuring. You would delight in hearing me call myself all sorts of ugly names."

"You know better than that, Randall. You are talking sheer nonsense now."

As she had rarely ever defied him, she had no measure for his irritability under contradiction.

“What in the devil has come over you in the last twenty-four hours? I fail to recognize you in your new role of shrew.” He was trembling with anger.

She flung her clasped hands outward and upwards with a gesture of passionate impatience.

“My old role was that of a patient minister to a splendid egotist, Randall. I have nourished your selfishness and arrogance by my absolute acceptance of you just as you were. I’m not going to analyze your weaknesses or your failures, even now. You said last night that you were hampered in your life’s work—hampered so that you could accomplish nothing; at least, that is the substance of what you said, wasn’t it, Randall?”

“Well, yes, I believe I did use words to that effect.”

“Did you mean them, Randall?”

“An artist is always hampered, to a certain degree, by marrying early in life,” he said, critically examining the glowing end of his cigar. He was not brave enough to look her in the face while stabbing her to the heart.

“Did you ever hear that sentiment before?”

“Yes. That is exactly what father said to you when you told him you and I wanted to get married. Father had great confidence in your ability, and thought we were very foolish to think of matrimony.”

“The old gentleman was a man of considerable penetration. I think better of his judgment now than I did then.”

“You mean that for me, Ran.”

He flung his cigar into the cuspidor with a muttered curse.

“D——n it, you are bent on driving me out of the house, aren’t you? You’ve spoiled my holiday for me, and you spoiled last night. You’ve spoiled my cigar now, and you’ve spoiled a good morning’s work. What are you driving at? Out with it.”

“I am driving at this. You must say that you did or did not mean that you are hampered in your work by me. This is not simply a contest of words, Randall. I know, as well as father does, that you are a man of genius, and that it is in you to do great and good work, if——”

“If what?”

Her prolonged silence compelled him to ask this question. Her arms hung straight by her sides, each hand was clinched until the nails pressed into the soft, pink-fleshed palms. Her eyes flashed and darkened like uncertain electric lights. Her lips, cheeks, and brow were marble-white.

“If you are not hampered.”

“Don’t make a fool of yourself, Marianne. I suppose the majority of men do make their flights on clipped wings. But it is not on record, I believe, that any feathered soarer ever sat down to contemplate its mutilated quills. I suppose I will do as well as any other clip-winged thing. If there is anything in me, poverty will spur it out of me, I imagine. Our prospects are not the most brilliant in the world.”

“If you were not married, you would be a great pet among the wealthy and fashionable patrons of art, I suppose, Ran. You have just that distinguished sort of good looks which captivate women at first sight.”

“You overpower me with your remarkable transitions from grave to gay, from lively to severe, my dear.” He smiled graciously into the grave, white face before him, and caressingly smoothed his side-whiskers.

“And you would make influential friends among them,” she went on, unsmilingly.

“Not unlikely. I’ve met some very nice people since my Psyche was put on exhibition. Art should be nourished on dainties or it languishes. I am afraid there is not the making of a garret genius in me. But what infernal nonsense we both are talking.”

“You would be happier that way, Ran.”

“Happier which way?”

“Unhampered!—free to wander in Bohemia with your brother artists, with no haunting thoughts of a wife waiting for you at home; free to accept pleasant invitations to grand houses, where beautiful women in silks and jewels will exalt you in your own estimation, by swinging the censer of adulation before you until you are intoxicated and ready for still higher flights; free from the harsh necessity of coming back to a poor little make-shift of a home where stupid calculations about expenses must be endured occasionally. I am the skeleton at your feasts, now, Ran. If it were not for me you could go to your daily tasks warmed and soothed and inspired by all the nice flattering things that have dropped from nice flattering lips.”

“I am afraid I am just cad enough to hanker after the soft side of life as you picture it. It’s awfully unnatural, we’ll admit, for argument’s sake, but demned if I wouldn’t rather be flattered than scolded, any day in the year.”

He had his hat in his hand by this time and was moving towards the door.

"Then you won't take it back, Ran?"

"Take what back?"

"That word 'hampered.'"

"You've selected a queer mode of making me do it," he said, with a coarse laugh, as he flung himself out of the studio, slamming the door fiercely after him.

"He does mean it, then," Marianne said, shivering as if with a chill.

She went back to the picture on the easel and worked with such unflagging energy, that when the picture-dealer came promptly at half-past ten o'clock, he found four very creditable "pot-boilers" ranged side-by-side along the studio wall.

His verdict was a favorable one. Marianne discouraged his efforts at art criticism. He was crude, and she was hurried. She had a great deal to do that day, and she needed all her strength for it.

Four o'clock found Randall Mackaye sufficiently tired of himself, of the three picture auctions he had wandered into one after the other, and of the men he found smoking in every studio he climbed into, to incline him for home and rest before dressing for a dinner that he had accepted an invitation to out at the Fosters. He pondered this matter uncomfortably while mounting the stairs to his own studio.

"If I'd known how things were going to turn out, I'd have refused. I suppose there will be the deuce to pay when she finds I'm off again for this evening."

But there was no one to object to his going out again that evening. The studio was as quiet as a church in

week-time, when he opened its door. He lighted the gas and looked on the table for any mail matter that might have come during the day. He supposed and hoped that Marianne might have gone out to "walk off her sulks."

There were two letters lying under the drop-light: one was a badly folded affair in a crumpled, unstamped envelope; the other, a modish cream-tinted affair, had come through the mail and brought with it the breath of heliotrope.

Both were quite short. The heliotrope affair he read first. It was simply an announcement that Miss Jeanne Lenox would call for him in the carriage that evening to take him to the dinner at the Rockwoods, as it looked "so much like rain."

"A confoundedly impudent proceeding," he said, wrinkling his broad, smooth forehead perplexedly. "I wish that girl had some sensible womankind to look after her."

None the less there was a glow of gratified vanity at his heart when he laid down Miss Jeanne Lenox's thick missive and took up that other flimsy affair, which, hastily penned by a hand trembling with agitation, had carried with it no suggestion of Marianne's large, bold English characters, consequently had not received the respectful consideration of a glance thus far. Three ten-dollar bills, compactly folded, fell from the sheet on which his wife had scrawled her final decision:

"My dear Ran:—I have tried very hard to think that it did not matter much whether or not you took back that terrible word 'hampered,' but it does. I was never

much of a hand to enlarge on my own emotions, and it does not matter much what or how I feel while writing this, but I cannot make up my mind to stay where I stand in the way of your fullest development as an artist. No one need know that any change has taken place in your private life. Indeed, no one in your new circle knows that you have a wife, I imagine. I am not blaming you for this, for I have not forgotten that we agreed that, until you should have gained your foothold and I was able to make a proper appearance in public, I would remain unknown.

“As long as we were sure of each other, what did it matter to us whether the people who patronized your art and petted you for its sake knew anything of the background to your life? A poor, struggling artist, with a shabby, economical wife behind the scenes, would have found no favor in the circle upon which art is dependent for its sustenance.

“I think, when one finds that one has made a false step, it is best and bravest to retrace it before it is too late. I don't believe it is too late in your case, we have been married such a little while; only two years and a half. I leave you half of what the man paid for my trifles this morning. I am afraid your exchequer is rather empty.

“I want you to do yourself full justice, Randall. I shall hear of you should you ever become the great artist which you ought to become, now that you are no longer hampered by—

“MARIANNE.”

“Who would have believed she had such a devil of a

temper? She is positively vicious," said Randall, tearing his wife's letter into jagged pieces and throwing the fragments into the waste-paper-basket under the table. "I suppose she has gone to the old man with some lively statement. She can sulk it out on that line. Pouting is a game two can play at."

The bills he transferred to the inside pocket of his vest.

It occurred to him, while dressing for the dinner at the Rockwoods, as rather convenient than otherwise that Marianne should have selected that particular evening to transport her bad humor to her father's house in Hoboken. It would lessen the awkwardness of having Miss Lenox call for him in her carriage.

CHAPTER IV.

“COME and make me beautiful for to night, Florence,” Miss Jeanne Lenox said peremptorily, giving the last syllable of her maid’s name the full benefit of a somewhat dubious French accent.

“It has a soothing effect on Florence to be called *Flo-rance*,” Miss Lenox had been known to say apologetically, when her father, with masculine lack of penetration, charged her with affectation.

“Miss expects to meet her lover, then?” said Florence, the French maid, laying the novel she had been reading before Jeanne’s advent, open, face downward, so as not to lose her place.

Jeanne had come in with both hands full of small hard parcels, done up in smooth white paper, and tied about with pink twine. The dressing-table was strewn with these, and, hastily ungloving, she fell to work on the pink knots.

“Not exactly—lover—*Flo—rance*, but—dear me! can I possibly have been so stupid as to forget the Pozzoni? You told me to get the Pozzoni powder, didn’t you? No, not lover, Florence; admirer, friend. Oh! Florence, he is just splendid. Everybody adores him.”

A sceptical smile flitted across Florence’s sallow face, but was soon swallowed up in her discreet eyes, which

never saw one jot or one tittle more than it was proper for them to see.

She had been lady's-maid both in Paris and in New York too many years not to have outlived all enthusiasm save for her art. In her way Florence too was an artist. That splendid lover of Mademoiselle's over whom everyone was raving was a thing of small moment by himself—a matter of course.

"Where did Miss get this?"

She was holding a vial up to the light, examining its milky contents through the opaline glass with kindling eyes.

Jeanne looked at her anxiously. "Don't you like it, Florence? They told me at the bazaar that it would make a hideous old woman of sixty look like a beautiful young girl of sixteen."

"Miss Lenox is neither sixty nor sixteen," said Florence, oracularly. She had the stopper out of the vial now, and was inhaling the perfume in long, ecstatic whiffs. "The genuine article! The one only cosmetilline. I did not know one could get it here. My poor, dear Lady Eunice, how often have I prepared her for her drive or dinner or ball with this very same precious ointment! Lady Eunice was a beauty."

Jeanne liked to hear about the titled ladies who had been served by Florence on the other side of the water. It enhanced her own importance in having come into final possession of such a treasure.

Everybody called Florence "Jeanne Lenox's treasure." Mrs. Rockwood said she could think of nothing more fortunate than for a motherless girl like Jeanne, with no brothers or sisters, with her father absorbed in

Wall Street, and her mother's sister, her ostensible chaperon, lame and hypochondriacal, to have such a good, sensible, steady creature as Florence always at hand ; and Jeanne agreed with everybody,

"Tell me about your Lady Eunice, Florence," she said, obediently slipping her plump white arms into the lace-trimmed dressing-sack which Florence was holding out for her to invest herself in, preparatory to being made beautiful.

"There is not much to tell," said Florence, placing a chair in front of the long mirror for Jeanne's convenience, before beginning the mysteries of the toilet in grave earnest. "My Lady Eunice made a great mistake in life, and it made her look old before her time ; one should not need such things," shaking the opaline vial gently, "until time has turned against one, or one has had some great grief. Sorrow is not good for the complexion."

Jeanne laughed. Time was still her gracious ally, adding to, not robbing her of charms ; and grief and she were not acquainted as yet.

"What shall I do with it, then ? give it to Aunt Hildah, or stopper it tightly and wait for grief ?"

Florence's black eyes were fixed solemnly upon the mirror. She was peering into it to note the effect of the last coil her deft hands had given the shining rope of reddish-brown hair, which Jeanne Lenox was very proud of since Randall Mackaye had educated her up to an appreciation of Titian's favorite color.

"If Miss has a lover, grief will come soon enough ; it always does. *Ciel !* I hope it will not come to you as it came to my Lady Eunice."

“Florence, you are horrid. Your eyes looks as solemn as a priest’s at confessional, and your voice is as solemn as the penitent’s.”

“Miss has been to the confessional?”

“Never! That was just a fancy sketch. We are Episcopalians, Aunt Hildah and I; that is, if we are anything. But how did grief come to your Lady Eunice? What did she do that made cosmetilline necessary?”

“My Lady Eunice fell in love with another woman’s husband.”

“That was very naughty of your Lady Eunice,” said Jeanne, plying her chamois brush energetically across her pink, polished nails, which shone from the recent attack of the manicure. “She deserved to come to grief and to cosmetilline prematurely.”

“Not at all, Miss Jeanne; my Lady Eunice had nothing whatever to do with it.”

“Nothing to do with it? Nothing to do with falling in love with a married man?”

“No. It was the work of Destiny. Destiny threw her into the way of that other woman’s husband, they discovered their affinity for each other, and the consequences were inevitable.”

“What were the consequences?” said Jeanne, interestedly. She had no notion of questioning the ethics of her maid.

“When my Lady Eunice heard that her husband’s first wife had died in an asylum for the insane, she became melancholy, and melancholy always makes the complexion yellow. It was then we began to use cosmetilline. Poor Lady Eunice! A less tender nature

than hers would have preserved its beauty in spite of all."

"Her husband's first wife! Then she married the man?"

"What did you suspect, Miss Lenox? Of course she married him. Had they not been searching for each other since ever their souls had been launched into space? My Lady Eunice! What a lovely saint she was! She owed it to my lord not to age so rapidly. My lord grew morose when my Lady Eunice faded and pined. Small blame to him for seeking amusement away from home!"

Plainly, Florence was an excellent companion for Jeanne Lenox, young, ardent, untutored!

Jeanne's hair was dressed now, and Florence had buttoned the little high-heeled boots about her silken-clad ankles before fetching the blue silk and velvet costume that they had decided on between them as most becoming. Jeanne was distinctly anxious to excel herself for this occasion, and to excel everybody else, of course.

"Florence," she asked, leaning towards the mirror to pat the soft fringe of curls on her forehead into more becoming positions, "you believe in affinities, then, do you? Souls' mates, and all that sort of thing?"

"Without doubt, Miss Jeanne. Do not you?"

"I don't know yet," said the girl, emerging with a very pink face from the heavy drapery the maid had flung skilfully over her head; "but I hope fate will never play me the malicious trick she played your Lady Eunice, and marry my affinity off before we find each other."

"I hope so, too, Miss Lenox, from my heart; but if she should——" Florence's mouth was too full for utterance. There were bows and things to be pinned about the sweeping draperies, and her mouth was full of sharp pins.

Jeanne finished the sentence for her:

"If she should, Florence, we will fall back on cosmetilline. I am glad to know of such a panacea to grief."

She laughed—that easy, insolent laugh which seemed forever defying fate to do its worst—the laugh which had rasped Marianne Mackaye's nerves to the utmost.

A little later she said, regarding her own reflection in the mirror with pardonable complacency:

"You had better call Aunt Hildah, Florence; you know she never will omit the ceremony of inspection."

Florence dropped the plump white arm along which she had patiently plied a small silver button-hook to the twenty-first button-hole, and gave an audible sniff of scorn.

To her, Miss Hildah Warren's "ceremony of inspection" was little short of an insult. What should a poor, lame, sick woman, brought up in the obscure rural regions, the dear knew where, know about the proprieties or the improprieties of a wealthy, fashionable young lady's life in the city? This to herself. To Jeanne:

"I hope you will not allow Miss Warren to make any alterations. You are perfect to-night, Miss. I am sure your lover"—

"Not lover, Florence!" with a swift, angry blush, followed by a sweet, pardoning smile.

“—Admirer—friend—affinity, then, will like you best just as you are. He is rich, Miss Jeanne?”

“No; a struggling genius, Florence.”

“Ah, well, that is a pity. But then, Miss will have enough for the two. Now I will go for Miss Warren.”

“As well fetch in the cat that sits by the kitchen range, to criticise,” said Florence to herself, spitefully, as she trod the softly carpeted halls with a gliding, noiseless step in search of Miss Hildah Warren, Jeanne’s duenna.

The girl she had left behind her, fully equipped, even to her fan, a toy of fine lace and carved pearl sticks, stood in front of her mirror engaged in self-contemplation. There was something deeper than personal vanity in the intense gaze of her wide, clear, childlike gray eyes.

“Will he like me best just as I am? Oh, I hope so, I hope so! I want to be beautiful for him, him only of all the world.”

She turned from the glass quickly as she heard the slow, regular thump of Miss Hildah’s cane in the corridor, just outside her door.

“How do I look, auntie?”

She spread her gloved arms and hands outward, giving the full, graceful contour of her perfect figure the advantage of an unbroken line. Her cheeks were aflame with excitement.

Miss Hildah’s eyes travelled from the crown of her shining head to the tips of her little boots.

“You are altogether too young and too handsome to be allowed such large liberty. No one at all to— Oh, my dear child!”

“ ‘No one at all ’ to do what? I have you and Florence.”

“ Florence certainly knows how to dress you. But I——” Miss Hildah sighed wearily. “ Oh, Jeanne, I have been young and admired myself, in my time. I know what the temptations of this gay world are.”

Florence, straightening the things on the disordered toilet table, elevated her thin shoulders in a French shrug of incredulity. Jeanne made a little *moue*.

“ Don’t moralize, Aunt Hildah ; I’m not dressed for a lecture. I am going to enjoy myself thoroughly to-night. It is only a quiet little dinner at Mrs. Rockwood’s. Florence has been saying all sorts of nice things to me, and I know when Florence approves I must be looking well. So don’t spoil it all.”

“ Miss is perfect, *ce soir*,” Florence murmured, enthusiastically.

“ Of course Florence is going with you? If it were not that my lameness made me so conspicuous in company——”

Jeanne hesitated and blushed. It had seemed a simple enough thing a little while before, looking down upon Florence, as she knelt before her to button her boots, to impart the information that she was going to pick up Mr. Mackaye on her way to Mrs. Rockwood’s. It seemed a harder thing to say it to her aunt. “ Aunt Hildah has such a trying way of stickling over small points of etiquette.”

“ Miss Warren is antique—obsolete,” Florence had more than once daringly affirmed in Jeanne’s presence.

“ Of course I go with Miss Jeanne,” said Florence, sweeping the girl’s flushed face with a warning glance,

before letting her grave black eyes rest in cold surprise on Miss Warren's peevish countenance.

"That, then, makes it all right," said Miss Hildah, struggling up from the low easy-chair by the aid of her stick; "and, Jeanne, do take notice of young Mrs. Verplanck's dress. She is sure to be there. Mrs. Rockwood never omits her. Mrs. Buckland was here yesterday, and she says Mrs. Verplanck's entire wardrobe for this summer was gotten up by Felix, in Paris. Find out where the Rockwoods are going this summer. We must get out of town——"

"Miss Lenox will be late," said Florence, coming in from a short absence, with her own hat and gloves on; and she looked inexorably at the clock on Jeanne's mantel-shelf.

"I will find out everything, aunty," Jeanne said, swooping down upon Miss Hildah's withered cheek with a fleeting caress. "Tell papa—oh, I forgot; he always goes to the club, Thursdays."

She was gone, leaving the dressing-room looking like a gilt cage from which some bright-plumaged bird had just made its fluttering escape.

"Florence," Jeanne asked, as her maid placidly followed her into the coupé, "how could you tell poor old Aunt Hilda such an awful fib? You know you aer not going to Mrs. Rockwood's with me. I told you I had promised Mr. Mackaye to save him that horrid car ride."

"I think I have not told Miss Warren any untruth. I have a sick cousin, who lives on South Fifth Avenue. If Miss Jeanne will let me ride so far in the coupé I

will be glad. If she objects, I can go in the stage, or I can walk."

Jeanne laughed indulgently. She began to think she had never fully appreciated Florence before then.

When the coupé stopped in front of the studio building, Florence got out on the side next the street, and walked rapidly away under the trees in the square; not so far distant, however, but that when Randall Mackaye came out, following Jeanne's be-buttoned footman, she was close enough to form her own astute opinion of his personal appearance.

"He walks like a king, and, *ciel!* what a superb head!" This, as Randall stood for a second with head uncovered before her mistress. "There will be scarcely room for the two of them in that cramped coupé; but they will not mind that! He will not mind, she will not mind; no, not if it entirely crush that lovely train. She should have taken the large carriage."

Florence's professional instincts came uppermost, and she glowered angrily after the swift-rolling carriage in impotent discontent.

No, they did not mind. Jeanne was absolutely content. She was content to occupy the remnant of space not needed for Randall's magnificent proportions. While he? The ease of the nicely poised springs, the smooth, noiseless progress of the carriage, the delicate fragrance that was part of Jeanne's refined atmosphere, the caressing voice in which she was prattling to him, with childlike eagerness, of the veriest nothings, all quite filled the measure of his content.

"Unquestionably," he said to himself, lending a polite ear to Jeanne's description of a tennis tourna-

ment she had attended since last seeing him, "this is a pleasanter way of spending the evening than listening to Marianne scold. I am glad she has taken her doldrums to Hoboken. Vastly pleasanter ! Poor little thing !"

"Poor little thing !" Whom he dedicated that unspoken comment to he scarcely knew himself. Randall Mackaye rarely ever marred a positive enjoyment by untimely moralizing.

He was distinctly enjoying himself as he sat by Jeanne Lenox in the shining coupé which was conveying him towards Mrs. Rockwood's in such creditable style.

CHAPTER V.

“Poor little thing!”

He knew distinctly to whom he applied the words a few hours later, when Jeanne, having put him down in front of the studio building, leaned out of the carriage to declare ecstatically that she had had a “perfectly lovely time.”

Florence, gaunt of figure and stealthy of tread, had emerged suddenly from under the greenery, made weird by the electric lights in the square, and, opening the coupé for herself, had taken her place by her mistress' side. She was just in time to catch the closing sentences of the colloquy, but Florence was an experienced hand at piecing odds and ends together. Jeanne was leaning towards the sculptor as he made his adieux from the carriage block.

“And when will love's young dream be realized?” Florence heard asked in Jeanne's eager young voice.

“Soon, very soon, for you, I hope.”

“Tease! You know I am talking about the statue. You have made me wild with curiosity.”

“Miss Lenox will catch cold. The night air is raw,” said Florence, in a discreet undertone, from the other side of the carriage.

“Your maid is right,” said Randall, composedly; “I shall I give your driver his orders?”

“Home,” said Jeanne, drawing her pink, flushed face back from the glare of the two big lamps that flanked the studio’s entrance door.

A soft, fluttering sigh fell on Florence’s trained ears, then the girl by her side sat as still as if sleep had suddenly overtaken her, bringing love’s young dream in its embrace.

“Miss Lenox has lost her right-hand glove,” said Florence, laying a daring finger on her mistress’ wrist. The girl’s pulse was beating fast and furiously. Jeanne shook the cool, insolent fingers off with an impatient motion.

“The glove is somewhere in the carriage, I suppose. I drew it off to locate some hair-pins that were piercing my skull.”

Florence satisfied herself that the glove was not in the coupé.

“It is a pity to break the pair,” she said, with calm insolence. “Monsieur must have appropriated it. Do these men never stop to think of the cost of such a pair of gloves? And your lovely corsage roses, Miss Lenox, are a complete wreck. Did I pin them in so carelessly as all that?”

Jeanne laughed softly, and the jewels on her bared white hand flashed as she laid it on her defrauded corsage.

“Florence, you are pitiless. Aunt Hildah herself could not be any more inquisitorial. Does one ever return from an entertainment without being wrecked, as you call it, to a certain extent? I did not lose my roses; I gave them to monsieur. He said the combination of tints was perfect. That was a compliment to you. He

is going to make a little water-color sketch of them. I will have it framed and give it to you—perhaps.”

“Miss Lenox is very, very kind.”

“Kind! To whom?”

“Oh, to me, for her ‘perhaps,’ and to monsieur for the gift of her roses and—her ungloved hand.”

“Florence, you are insufferable!”

Perhaps the girl’s fresh beauty, her childish inexperience, her motherless condition—something, touched a possibly unsullied spot in the Frenchwoman’s seared soul, for, with an intensity of voice and manner which Jeanne had never before witnessed, she answered earnestly :

“My young lady, you are very young and very ignorant. You have no mother. I know the world. I know men. They are all desperately wicked. Be careful, that is all.”

“Florence, I quite hate you!”

“I know you do to-night, my young lady.”

They were at home now. Florence followed the flying figure upstairs as soon as she had gathered the wraps together and made sure by a thorough search that the glove was not in the carriage. Jeanne turned sharply on her at the head of the stairs.

“I shall not need you to-night, Florence; go to bed. I am going to tell Aunt Hildah all about the dinner and Mrs. Verplanck’s dress before I go to my own room.”

“Miss will want me when she does go to her own room. Her bodice laces behind.”

“No, I shall not want you.”

Jeanne emphasized this decision with a passionate

stamp of her wayward little foot. She could stand anything better than contradiction.

"I shall be very angry with you, Florence, if you oppose me any further."

Florence turned away silently. Jeanne went into Miss Hildah's room, and, seating herself on the foot of that lady's bed, unloosed the flood-gates of gossip, and let the inundation submerge them both, to the absolute oblivion of the silent, waiting figure which Jeanne felt quite sure of finding in her dressing-room, in spite of her crisp commands.

When the Lenox equipage, with its shining panels, its high-stepping thoroughbreds, and its glittering harness, had rolled softly away from him, Randall Mackaye had replaced the hat held courteously in his hand while Jeanne was in sight, and muttered "Poor little thing!" as above recorded; and he then turned and gave an upward glance toward the windows of his own studio in the fourth story of the high building.

Might not Marianne possibly have returned in his absence? It was quite dark up there. He believed he should enjoy his cigar better sitting on one of the people's benches, over there in the square, near the fountain, where a meagre stream of Croton water made limited excursions into the air, before falling in a thin shower upon the assorted lot of lily pads and Egyptian lotuses which filled the stone basin. He abhorred solitude.

It was too early for bed, and too late for the theatres. That was the worst feature of dinners, unless one had

filled out the evening's programme beforehand, which he had not done.

He had meant to have spent that whole evening with Marianne. It was her fault that he was sitting there on an iron bench, smoking his cigar, with never a soul to exchange a word with, while she was cooling her unrighteous wrath in the stuffy little boarding-house in Hoboken, that her father called "home" !

But it was not of Marianne he was thinking all the while he sat there in the square, taking amused note of the wasteful energy with which a pair of Teutonic citizens were discussing the fluctuating phases of the great Emperor's illness. It was of Jeanne Lenox, who had just driven away from him, flushed, excited, happy.

"What an emotional little thing it is !"

She was safe enough with him, he assured some unseen accuser; but in some men's hands the girl's impetuous, untrained nature might lead her into trouble. "As unlike Nan-nan as possible! Wine and ice-water are not more unlike."

It was with a distinct sensation of self-approval that Mr. Mackaye reviewed the events of the evening. He had treated Miss Lenox with really paternal kindness. He had made it perfectly clear to her, or at least tried to do so, that he was wedded, "indissolubly wedded," as he had told her, to the most exacting of all mistresses, Art.

I shall not go to see her, he virtuously resolved; not even if, as she declares she means to make him do, her father should call in person. The thing will die out of itself. Egad, though, what a business card it would be to have Jerome Lenox call in person ! It would

give me a regular boom. His daughter declared he was quite an art critic. Perhaps he might offer a fancy price for the statue. Perhaps, even, admission to the Union League might come through acquaintance with Jerome Lenox.

Two intrusive faces had thrust themselves by turns into his reverie: one, that of a pale, classic, offended Juno; the other, a girl's face, flushed, happy, love-lighted! The Egotist put them both away from him to revel in a delightful vision of himself, enjoying all the luxurious liberty and sumptuous idleness of club-life at the League.

"Egad!"—he threw the stump of his smoked-out cigar energetically upon the asphalt pavement at his feet—"I never was intended for the seamy side of life. Fate played me a scurvy trick when she sent me adrift in the world to make my own living."

He leaned back and stretched his long legs luxuriously. He still felt a trifle cramped from his drive in Jeanne's little coupé. He took his hat off and held it in his hand to let the cool night air fan his forehead. His head ached slightly. It had been "a trying day," he told himself.

A woman, a tired, shabby-looking woman, hurrying by with a dressmaker's big box bumping awkwardly against her knees, stopped to glance at him. His was not the sort of figure one generally encountered sitting on the benches in Washington Square between the hours of ten and eleven.

The electric light fell full upon the snowy expanse of bosom that went with his dinner dress. On the bench by him lay a big bunch of fading roses. With his

long, firm fingers he was restlessly caressing his long side-whiskers. The rest of his face was clean shaven. A handsome, bright face at all times, notwithstanding a certain shade of restless dissatisfaction that marred its serenity.

“It’s Ran, as sure’s you’re born. There ain’t but one Randall Mackaye in this world. The Lord couldn’t afford to make a pair of him.”

The shabby woman scurried on out of sight, with a mirthless sort of a laugh. She had halted for scarcely a half-second. She made no sign of recognition. As for him he had not even noticed her slight halt, nor the hunger in her faded blue eyes.

The tower clock over in Sixth Avenue was striking eleven when the sculptor mounted the stairs to the studio in the fourth story. He was going back to his rooms very reluctantly. The studio was dark but for the moon-like radiance flung into it, across the tree tops, from the tall electric lights in the square.

The veiled statue gleamed whitely in the obscurity. There was a pretty antique lamp, which Marianne had picked up at an auction sale, hanging just over it. This Randall applied a match to, and by its soft, silvery light he drew aside the shroud from his masterpiece.

He stood before it a long time, with his arms folded across his broad chest. Its pure, chaste beauty seemed that night a thing which he had had no hand in creating. It was almost as if Marianne herself was there before him, cold, distant, beautiful. Oh, so beautiful, so majestic in her calm disdain of the petty selfishness that had filled his day !

“You will come back to me, *ma belle*. Yes, you

will come back to me. Freely and of your own accord you left me. Freely and of your own accord you must come back to me. I shall not woo you back. That would be to cry *peccavi*. Love's young dream is not quite over yet, for—you—*ma belle*."

Another second, only, he stood there in silent contemplation of the beautiful, still, white face before him.

The antique lamp overhead, swaying gently by its silver chains, cast flickering shadows over the sculptured features with lifelike effect. It was almost as if Marianne herself had turned her regal head away from him, in frowning rebuke of his presumption.

With a short, quick sigh, born rather of a feeling of physical fatigue and general dissatisfaction with the turn things had taken than any shamed sense of personal wrong-doing, the Egotist drew the shroud once more over his masterpiece and turned away in the direction of his bedroom.

At the moment he laid his head on the pillow he remembered that he had left Jeanne Lenox's roses out yonder on the iron bench in Washington Square.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL an inexperienced girl's abandonment to the sweet tumult of a first passion ; all the fervid imaginings that can find nourishment in a man's bold glance and meaningless adulation ; all the intoxicated flights of fancy and the ecstasy of foundationless hopes which go to make of love's young dream a somewhat unrestful experience, beset Jeanne's soul that night and drove sleep from her pillow, with no better final result than the prosaic resolution to breakfast with her father.

"I will take breakfast with father and talk to him about it. Now I'll count a thousand and go to sleep. I will not think another thought."

Whether she kept that resolution, formed about three o'clock A. M., no one knows ; but she did keep the one to breakfast with her father. Breakfasting with her father held a deep significance always, both for Mr. Jerome Lenox and the young lady herself. Mr. Lenox laid down his *Herald* with a smile of pleased surprise as she fluttered into his presence, with a rustle of crisp lawn drapery, with little pennons of gay ribbons afloat from various points. The somewhat sombre magnificence of the dining-room was brightened by her coming. It was as if a bunch of fragrant flowers had been brought in. Perching on the arm of her father's chair, like some bird of gay plumage, she twined her cool,

soft arms around his neck to make the important announcement :

“I got up two hours earlier on purpose to breakfast with you, you very dear, handsome, big, old papa. Express your gratitude fittingly.”

Mr. Lenox drew her round in front of him and held her at arm's length to survey her critically, laughed indulgently, and drew her caressingly within kissing range.

“That means no surplus in the treasury. It isn't every woman that can dare the morning's glare as well as you can, Jeanne. Is it that white frock?”

“I went to bed last night like a Christian. My roses are the reward of virtue. But I have not heard you say you will be glad to have me pour out your cocoa yet ;” she moved away from him and took her place behind the tray ; “and I don't think it is at all nice of you, papa, to suppose that I want money every time I come near you.”

“No? Why, I thought that was being just as nice as possible.”

“Money is not everything,” said Jeanne, virtuously.

“No, not everything.” By implication of emphasis the broker left it to be understood that it was very nearly everything.

“Papa, do you love art?”

Jeanne asked this with sudden irrelevance, her big eyes fixed gravely on his face. Her cheeks were aflame, and her heart was thumping so ferociously against her bodice that the knot of ribbons pinned at its open neck fluttered distressfully.

“Bless my soul ! A new departure? The æsthetic

this time. Did my Jeanne curtail her morning nap exclusively to discuss art with her Wall Street bear?"

"I only call you that when you are ugly and cross. You look nice this morning, and I adore you."

"Thanks. It is no small matter to have a handsome woman of brains and perspicuity tell one he is adorable, especially when one's mouth is full of buttered toast. Jeanne, I am afraid you are reduced to actual penury. Let me see your check-book."

Jeanne laughed, and leaving the tray came over once more to perch on the arm of his chair, where her mouth was in close proximity to his ear, but her face was not in full view of those clear, steady, penetrating gray eyes of his.

"Now, father, don't tease. I have a favor to ask of you, and you must promise beforehand to grant it."

"Reasonable, as usual. But as it is entirely immaterial whether I promise beforehand or simply do your royal highness's bidding with my customary unquestioning docility, heave ahead, my daughter."

"Don't be slangy, dear. Slang doesn't become your style of beauty. You look like a Roman senator, you know, minus the toga. Now, papa, you do love art; don't deny it."

"I haven't the slightest intention of doing so; but, Jeanne, would you mind combing my hair with just one or two fingers, instead of all ten at once? I am afraid I won't have time to revisit my dressing-room before going down-town."

Jeanne transferred her restless little fingers from the short, thick, iron-gray locks of hair, which she had been

coaxing into a less rigid attitude about her father's temples, to the sash ends about her own trim waist.

"And I have heard you say, plenty of times, that you thought our wealthy men had better spend more money encouraging native talent rather than in purchasing old-world pictures at such reckless prices. Don't deny it, papa."

"Well!" combatively, "and I stick to it. That's sound common-sense, whether it's art logic or not."

"It is both," said Jeanne, with a sagacious nod of her pretty head.

"Both? And that from you? Why you've always fought like a little tigress for the Old Masters, and the Renaissance, and the dear knows what art bosh besides."

"I have changed my mind," said Jeanne, composedly.

"Oh! Given up the foreigners?"

"Yes, and am going to devote myself to the encouragement of native talent."

Mr. Lenox smiled surreptitiously into his cocoa cup. He had views of his own touching Jeanne's sudden arousal in favor of native talent, which it would never do to express in words. Jeanne was given to "fads," which she held up to the world for convictions with fierce but transient zeal. However, it was altogether too rare and sweet a thing to have her perched there on the arm of his chair, infusing her own fresh, pure personality into his day's beginning, for him to risk any brutal criticism on her inconsistency.

"Well, dear?"

He was infinitely patient with her, this great, big, broad-chested, clear-headed man, who spent his days

down among the money-makers, with always the under-thought of Jeanne and Jeanne's good abiding with him. "It is for Jeanne ; all for Jeanne ; my pretty, pretty, Jeanne." She was all he had to care for, you see, and to be foolish about.

"Well, father"—her voice suddenly became intense in its pleading tones—"I want very, very much to have you prove how much of all you have said about native talent meant anything."

"Endowment for League?—art class?—something of that sort?"

"No, papa, nothing on so grand a scale. I am modest, you see. I just want you to be good to and help along one solitary, deserving struggler."

"Woman?"

"No, a man ; a young man that I met last night at Mrs. Rockwood's."

"For the first time?"

"Oh dear, no. Everybody that is anybody has invited Mr. Mackaye about this winter and spring ; one meets him everywhere. Mrs. Rockwood raves over him. He was out at the Fosters a day or two ago."

"That doesn't look like starvation. The Fosters don't take kindly to meritorious mendicants."

"No, oh no ; neither do I. I have no faith in out-at-elbows talent. Mr. Mackaye is not out-at-elbows, nor does he eat his dinner as if he only got one a month. He dresses nicely, and looks at home everywhere. No one is ashamed to have Mr. Mackaye come to them. He is the thing this winter."

"A sort of woman's pet."

"Indeed, nothing of the sort, father. Of course, if he

expects to get on here, he must make himself known personally. And the women are the only medium open to him at present. He can't advertise himself like a quack medicine or a patent shoe polish, papa."

"Not well. But what is he about, and what do you want me to do about him?"

"I will tell you," said Jeanne, speaking earnestly and rapidly, perhaps out of consideration for the restless glance her father cast towards the mantel clock, perhaps from sheer nervousness. "He is from way up somewhere in Vermont. Mrs. Rockwood, you know, can always find out more than anybody else can. She says he has painted portraits and all sorts of pictures, to support himself while at work upon his real life-work, sculpture. He tells her—you know everybody confides in Mrs. Rockwood—that he has a piece of sculpture in an unfinished condition which he is confident will meet with the plaudits of discriminating art critics all over the world, when put on exhibition. He has been a long time at it, and Mrs. Rockwood says that, although, of course, he don't tell her so, she imagines he is so poor that he has to stop work on his masterpiece in order to make enough money to pay his room rent and feed himself. Horrible, isn't it, papa?"

"What, Jeanne?—the masterpiece or the man?"

"That such a genius should have to think about room rent and baker's bills and—and—things!"

"Inconvenient, but not exactly horrible. And you want me—to—"

"Satisfy yourself that this young sculptor is really deserving, and—then—"

"Well—then?"

“Do for him, father, what you would like some other man to do for—Len; our Len, who is wandering no one knows where.”

Mr. Lenox rose abruptly from the table. So abruptly, that Jeanne could scarcely decide whether she had made a mistake in mentioning her brother's name or not. She looked after her father anxiously, standing there with her pretty hands clasped about the high back of the chair he had just vacated. That he was not very angry with her she felt quite sure when he came back to her from a short excursion into the library to ask:

“Where does your beggar student hold forth, Jeanne?”

“He is neither a beggar nor a student,” said Jeanne, in hot resentment.

“Your prodigy, then.”

“Nor that.”

“The estimable young gentleman, then, whom, to pleasure her royal highness, I suppose I must look up.”

Jeanne rewarded him with an ecstatic little hug and a shower of kisses, between which she managed to impress upon his intelligence the exact location of the studio building.

As Mr. Lenox entered the carriage which had been waiting for him long enough to excite his stolid coachman to a pitch of mild but mute speculation, it occurred to him to congratulate himself on the possession of such a daughter.

A good-hearted little thing! What other girl of her set, with countless calls upon her time and thoughts, would even have remembered Mrs. Rockwood's needy protégé? If the fellow should prove himself really pos-

sessed of talent, Jeanne should find that all her father's utterances about fostering native talent had not been mere utterances.

He was fully prepared to patronize Mr. Mackaye when, on his homeward drive from the office that afternoon, he ordered his coachman round by the studio building.

He entered the studio in the fourth story at a most auspicious moment for the sculptor.

With his working blouse on, and his thick mass of brown hair covered by the silk skull-cap which he always wore when using the chisel, Randall was standing in front of his masterpiece, flushed from exercise, grave, alert, interested—a perfect picture of energetic absorption in his calling.

CHAPTER VII.

THE man of money advanced upon the man of ideas with the easy assurance of a personage whom even Fate had never ventured to rebuff.

“This looks like business,” Jeanne’s father said, holding his tall silk hat in one hand, while he extended the other to the sculptor with the utmost cordiality. “My name is Lenox, sir; Jerome Lenox. Happy to make your acquaintance.”

Randall had turned at the sound of advancing footsteps, and now flushed to the brim of his silken cap with a sort of guilty confusion, which Mr. Lenox mistook for natural and becoming modesty in a struggling, poor artist. Without being in any sense of the word purse-proud, this successful man from Wall Street never pretended to undervalue his possessions. Money was power. Randall’s embarrassment only made Mr. Lenox the more affable and reassuring; more so, perhaps, than he would have been could he have suspected that, after that momentary start of confusion, the sculptor was occupying himself mentally in “summing up” Jerome Lenox, of whom, of course, he had heard much and often, even before Jeanne’s appearance on his horizon.

“So, that was Jeanne Lenox’s father! A handsome, cordial, courteous gentleman. Shrewd enough, doubt-

less, in his own line, but as helpless and ignorant as a child, take him out of Wall Street. Especially powerless where his womankind were concerned. Not so much natural deficiency," Randall summed up, finally, "as habitual absorption in one set of ideas."

All this while he was laying aside his chisel and mallet, and divesting himself of his working cap. Then he rolled the big arm-chair up in front of the statue and begged Mr. Lenox to be seated.

"I have often heard of you, of course, sir—who has not?—and I am truly grateful for this call."

Mr. Lenox waved the compliment aside with his large, white, well-kept left hand; with his right he was adjusting his gold-rimmed eye-glass on his nose. Before matters went any farther he must decide for himself whether Jeanne's judgment had been warped by the fellow's good looks, and her good little heart touched by the story of his struggles, or whether there was any real talent here to be fostered.

"Do you know, sir," the sculptor went on, somewhat nervously, "people judge so much by appearances, that merely this call from you is enough to send me several rounds up the ladder."

It was not in the best taste, but he seemed laboring under a necessity for utterance. It mattered little what he said. Mr. Mackaye's instincts were not always the very finest.

Mr. Lenox laughed leniently but abstractedly. His eyes were fixed on the statue. It showed no mean order of talent. Jeanne was right. The fellow ought to be encouraged. Slowly, almost reluctantly, he finally turned his gaze from the statue to its maker.

"It must be a joy," he said, "to see a thing like that growing under your hand. Egad, it's fine enough to make a fellow repeat Pygmalion's experience. I believe that was the fellow that fell in love with his own job, eh? I'm not strong on mythology."

The sculptor made a restless movement. It had never before occurred to him that he should find it distasteful to have men criticise his masterpiece. "What an infernal idiot I am," he was saying severely of himself at the very moment Mr. Lenox was accepting his civil silence as an intimation of crudeness on his part. He good-naturedly admitted as much.

"I'm not going to make an ass of myself by attempting art criticism. It takes Jeanne to talk it by the yard without understanding a word of it. I'm simply an ignorant worshipper at the shrine of the beautiful. Now that," pointing his glasses at the statue, "strikes me as being very beautiful, and I'm proud to think it's the work of native genius, sir."

Randall bowed his acknowledgments becomingly.

"I am an American, sir, to the backbone. First, last, and always an American; and I believe in spending American money on American artists. Why should we fill our parlors, our galleries, our museums with big canvases simply because some foreigner with an outlandish name painted them?"

Mackaye was by nature too indolent a man to fight for an abstract matter of justice. The old masters must look out for themselves. His hands were too full for championship, so he supposed it was "because it is fashionable."

"But I am not fashionable," Mr. Lenox returned,

vehemently. "No, sir. Egad, I never was ; and, thank heaven ! when Mrs. Lenox lived, she was not fashionable. Miss Lenox—you know my daughter ? "

Randall met this sudden question with red cheeks and a stammering "Yes."

"You are too modest by half, sir," said Jeanne's father, somewhat inconsequently. "You must get over that trick of blushing if you want people to recognize you as a figure in the world. Well, sir, as I was about to say, my Jeanne—she's all I've got left—of course she's spoiled a little. She plays at fashionable life at a tremendous pace. But Jeanne's sound to the core. She never runs after a celebrity because he is a celebrity. He's got to show his grit. Now, you know some of our New York women just naturally make fools of themselves over you fellows. No offense. I mean women in the upper strata, who ought to have more sense."

Randall admitted, with a sort of proud humility, that his acquaintance with the "upper strata" was very limited.

"Yes, of course ; you're a new-comer. Your first year here, I believe, Jeanne told me. But you've made some headway with nice people, I believe. Jeanne tells me she met you at the Rockwoods' and heard of you at the Fosters'. The Fosters are rather offish as a rule."

Randall admitted, with his handsome head held well in the air, that he had had considerable kindness shown him since his *Psyche*, "a mere trifle," had been put on exhibition at the Academy.

"Yes, yes."

The Wall Street man was again studying the statue before him with absorbed interest.

"That's going to be a grand thing when it's finished."

The sculptor sighed audibly. He was thinking of his wife's impatient strictures on his indolence.

"Yes," he said, aloud, "*when* it is finished."

"You must have had a superb model for it. Egad, I'd like to see something half that fine in flesh and blood. Jeanne would stand a good chance for a step-mother."

To this Randall found no reply. The interview was beginning to halt perceptibly. Mr. Lenox showed visible signs of embarrassment. He had come there with the avowed purpose of helping forward this man's interests in some fashion, but he had not found things exactly as he had anticipated.

There was a certain self-sufficient look about the man which discountenanced any open offer of assistance. And his surroundings were as far removed from abject poverty as they were from luxury. To pull out his cheque-book and offer money to this "struggling genius," who carried himself so imperially, would really be brutal. The fellow might return insult for insult. Then Jeanne would call him a bungler.

It was plain to be seen that Jerome Lenox, one of the most imposing figures on Wall Street, stood shamefully in awe of his Jeanne.

This was a case calling for considerable finesse, but he was too busy a man to be running after this young sculptor every day. He would study him out in his own way, on his own ground.

All this passed through the broker's mind while Randall, in answer to a leading question from him, was discoursing with keen sarcasm on the statuary contained in a certain up-town museum.

Jerome Lenox sat with his head resting luxuriously on the velvet head-rest Marianne had contrived out of an old bonnet and some bits of ribbon, his fine, honest eyes placidly scanning Randall's intelligent features as they kindled with the enthusiasm of his utterances. Mackaye always talked well and lucidly about his chosen line of work. It required no physical effort to talk art. Perhaps, if it had, Jeanne's father would have gone away with no very decided convictions touching Jeanne's protégé, as he mentally catalogued the sculptor.

"You've really given me a delightful hour, sir, delightful. I feel as if I had learned something from you. I do, egad! and we must see more of each other. By-the-way, have you any engagement for to-morrow night?"

Randall examined his memoranda with the air of a man whose engagements were altogether too numerous to be entrusted to memory. He found he had an engagement for to-morrow night.

He would not throw himself at Lenox's head. Moreover, it was just possible that by the next night Marianne would be coming back in restored good-humor.

"Thursday then?"

He hesitated, only a second. That second was long enough for him to silence a conscience which was quite used to having its better dictates set aside. Why

should he deny himself the substantial benefits of this man's friendship because of a silly girl's foolish fancy?

"No, I have no engagement for Thursday."

"Well, then," said Mr. Lenox, cordially, "put us down for a quiet family dinner on Thursday. Six sharp. I want you to overhaul my picture-gallery and give me some advice about it. Jeanne declares it makes her blush. You see, Jeanne goes about a good deal and picks up no end of amateur twaddle that passes for art gospel with her. We both need an intelligent interpreter. You'll be doing a good work by taking the old gallery in hand."

They were walking along the corridor of the building towards the elevator, which was coming up as they reached its door. They were a handsome pair, as they stood there, Randall in his shabby working suit, and Jeanne's father in the studied elegance that always characterized his appearance.

He extended his hand for a friendly farewell clasp.

"We will look for you now, positively."

"I shall certainly do myself the honor," said Randall, stepping back from the opening door of the elevator to allow an old man ingress into the corridor.

The man who stepped out of the elevator presented the sharpest possible contrast to the man who stepped into it and was borne swiftly downward before Randall had greeted the new-comer.

In point of years, perhaps, there was very little margin, but this man was bent in form, wrinkled of brow, careworn of aspect generally, and held in his hand an excessively rusty black hat.

"Well, Ran?"

“How’re you, Mr. Grayson? I didn’t expect to see you over during this infernally hot spell.”

It was Randall’s father-in-law, and he led the way back to the studio in a curious frame of mind.

“It is a hot day,” said the old portrait-painter, “but if I remember right you generally manage to keep pretty cool up here.”

“Yes, there’s almost always a breeze up here. We’re so high up, you see.”

He would be pleasant, he said, virtuously, to himself, as long as the old man confined himself to impersonal matters ; but, if he had come there to meddle between man and wife, he would soon send him about his business.

Up to the present time the relations between the old portrait-painter (whose shabbiness and feebleness appeared to have been accentuated by Mr. Lenox’s elegance and superb physique) and his ambitious son-in-law had been pleasant.

Randall had not left the past sufficiently far behind him to have entirely lost sight of a certain bleak morning in November, when he had presented himself before Marianne’s father, in a very threadbare suit of clothes, and told him brusquely he wanted to become a portrait-painter, for which he could pay a little.

The old man had smiled into the eager boy face, and begun questioning him closely. The result had been favorable to the ambitious lad. To the slow-stepping old man by his side, conscience reminded him that day that he owed all he had accomplished up to that time, and all he hoped to do in the future. This forced retrospection made him kind. He pushed the big arm-

chair, that had just been vacated by the millionaire, closer to the open window.

"Sit down there, Mr. Grayson, and let me have your hat."

"How is it getting on?" the old man asked, fixing his keen glance on the statue.

There had been an *It* for them all three—Marianne, Randall, and himself—for a long time, now.

"Slowly," Randall answered, with peevish veracity. "I've been a lazy hound this summer. It's the air, I think. But I'm going to do better. I've been hard at work all day. What do you think of it? Come, now, give me an old-time criticism. I think I should be the better for a regular quiz."

The old man should see, he resolved, that he did not include him among his domestic troubles.

Master and pupil were once more on the old terms. Randall had always been a source of satisfaction to his teacher. He was ambitious, talented, eager. It had been months since Mr. Grayson had seen the statue they all expected so much of. Before he was well aware of it himself he was fairly launched into an exhaustive criticism of Randall's work. He wound up his lecture with a tired sigh and a gentle smile.

"There! Do you suppose I braved this heat just for the pleasure of snubbing your new-fangled methods, sir?"

"You will stay to dinner?" said Randall, looking kindly down at the thin, worn face of his master.

"Yes, if Nan-nan will give me some."

"Marianne?"

There was such a strange ring of surprise in Randall's voice that the old man looked up at him anxiously.

"She isn't ill?"

"She is not here."

"Not here?"

"No. I thought all this while she was with you."

"With me! Why should she be with me?"

After all, then, the unpleasant task of explanation was laid on him! He told Marianne's father all there was to tell as briefly as possible. He made a strenuous effort at impartiality, which was creditable to him as far as it went, but self-blame was not much in Randall Mackaye's line.

Marianne's father heard him through with pathetic patience. His gray head moving restlessly to and fro, as he looked about on the room his child had made pretty. His long, thin hands were clasped firmly across the top of his walking-stick.

"Of course she will come back to me," said Randall, with nervous arrogance. "She left me in unreasonable pique, and her own good sense will show her who is to blame. She is amply able to care for herself for a few days. But why did she not go to you?"

"Because," said the old man, rising and expanding with a certain moral majesty, "she would not have been the Marianne I know if she had come home whimpering with a tale against her husband."

He took up his shabby hat and moved towards the door. Randall intercepted him:

"You are not going without a bite of something?" Then, falling back before the calm scorn in the keen old

eyes, he asked nervously: "Where are you going? What are you going to do?"

"I am going to look for my daughter." The portrait-painter waved him imperiously out of his path. "I never knew her do an unconsidered thing in all her life—unless—indeed—it was marrying you."

With this parting shaft he passed out into the corridor. Randall did not walk with him to the elevator. It was never necessary, and to-day it would not be pleasant.

He paced the floor restlessly for a few moments, the trend of his thoughts escaping him in disjointed words and sentences: "Where in thunder is Marianne if not in Hoboken? How long is she likely to keep this infernal nonsense up?" Then—with a sigh, a long-drawn sigh of futile regret—"If I'd only waited!—two little years longer— That would have been a father-in-law one could have used!"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a queer chance that had sent the old Hoboken portrait-painter across the river on one of his rare visits to "Nan-nan" that particular morning!—almost a malicious chance! If he had staid quietly at home, which, indeed, was precisely the thing he did for about three hundred days of the year, permitting himself the most diluted sorts of dissipation on the odd sixty-five, he would have gone to his supper that night better informed and less miserable. As it was, he turned away from the studio, his gentle soul full to the brim of a sort of impotent fury, which he essayed to work off by rushing aimlessly from one picture-gallery to the other, until night overtook him still wandering among the hurrying, rushing crowds, not one individual of whom, he reflected, with futile querulousness, cared a rush for his fatigue, his loneliness, his pained perplexity concerning "Nan-nan's" whereabouts.

"I'll make a night of it," he said, with dismal recklessness. "Some supper, and then the theatre. I can think it out better here than over yonder."

He shrank unaccountably from going back over the river. "Marianne is on this side of it." Somewhere in that wilderness of roofs his girl was hiding her trouble from him. There was a little Italian restaurant in Third Avenue where he and "Nan-nan" had taken many a merry meal together when they were just living

for each other alone, and would come over to the city to see Irving and Terry or hear Patti. Only the very best, in the way of entertainment, had ever been good enough for him and "Nan-nan." Perhaps she would go to Moretti's for her meals. She must eat. No matter how wretched she was, she must eat.

He hurried towards the little eating-house, and, establishing himself at one of the red cherry-wood tables where he must see everyone that came in, absently gave his order, and then sat there patiently waiting for that which never came.

His half-dozen fried oysters came, and he ate them slowly. Then he sat there moving the catsups and the sauces and the pepper and vinegar bottles hither and thither, now arranging them in single file along the bare, polished surface of the table, now shoving them impatiently into a heap at one end, until it was useless to remain any longer.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and his Nan-nan would never come alone to a public eating-house so late as that.

"They made a mistake, a big mistake; I knew it, I knew it. I told them so beforehand."

That was the burden of his thoughts as he rose finally, and, reaching up to the rack over the table for his shabby hat, he put it on and went out into the glittering street once more, slowly and reluctantly.

It had been the burden of his thoughts all day long, ever since Randall had made his one-sided statement. It was the burden of his thoughts as he sat in the crowded theatre looking unsmilingly on at the play which was provoking billows of mirth all about him.

It was the burden of his thoughts as, late at night, with a guilty sense of wrong-doing, born of his regular and blameless life, he fitted the latch-key into the outer door of his Hoboken boarding-house and groped his way upstairs through the darkened hall.

He felt for the handle of his own door and opened it cautiously, exclaimed "God bless my soul!" closed the door eagerly behind him, and rushed tumultuously upon—Marianne.

She was sitting by the table sewing. The gas was burning at full-cock, and all around about her piles of his wearing apparel lay in confused heaps.

"Nan-nan!"

"You naughty papa! Here I've been spending the entire day waiting and waiting to see you, and now you've got to shelter me for the night."

He looked at her in silent perplexity. She was very pale, but absolutely serene—outwardly, at least. Her grave eyes met his unflinchingly.

"I—I—went over to see you this morning, daughter." The agitation was all on his side.

"So I supposed." She pushed a vase containing the big bunch of carnations she had brought with her farther towards the centre of the table with a little restless movement. "You saw Randall, of course?"

"Yes, I saw him. He thought you were with me all this time. Why did you give me such a fright, Nan-nan? And what have you kicked up such a devil of a mess for?"

She looked so placid that he could not help indulging himself in one little spurt of wrath. With the average man, unreasoning anger is the usual revulsion from

causeless anxiety. She had seated herself and resumed work on the frayed cuffs of one of his shirts.

"I never meant to give you a fright, father. I would not have done such a thing, and you know it. It was just a chance, an odd one too, that took you to town this morning. I only left—the—my husband two days ago."

"But you are going back to him?"

"No."

She stopped to bite her thread off before emitting that monosyllable. Her teeth remained clinched tightly afterwards.

"I don't mean immediately," Mr. Grayson added, hastily. "Stay here until you get over your huff, of course. You are always welcome, dear."

There was something in the set, pale face before him that dictated a temporizing policy. She raised her eyes coldly to meet his.

"I am not in any 'huff,' father. Randall and I made a mistake. You know you said we were about to do it before the ceremony was performed."

"Yes, yes; but that's all past and done with. You blundered, but you can't unblunder."

She was looking away from him now, pulling the carnations to pieces with merciless fingers, and scattering their crimson petals on the white linen in her lap.

"Father, don't you think Mr. Mackaye has very decided talent?" she asked, suddenly.

"Marked, marked," said the old man, enthusiastically. His spirits were rising. Plainly it was nothing but a woman's petulant outbreak, and by a little timely exaltation of Randall he might turn the tide once more

in favor of peace and amity. "There's nothing that fellow couldn't do, if he'd only apply himself. Ran's a luxurious dog. He likes things to be kept smooth and easy, you know. He's always at his best when he's had a good big dose of flattery, judiciously administered."

He went blundering on. If he could only show Nan-nan these little harmless idiosyncrasies of her husband's, she might manage him better in future.

"Precisely," said Marianne, in an aloof voice, more as if she were fitting her father's conclusions to her own in some inner recess of her being than as if she were listening to him. "Flattery is the breath of his nostrils; luxury the prime necessity of his existence. I have been a great injury to Randall, father. I have hampered him."

"Who says so?" the old man asked, with clinched fists and flashing eyes.

"I say so. You say so. Results say so."

"*I* say so?"

"Yes, you. You were the very first one that said so. Yours was a warning. I did not heed that. I have had another warning, father. I do not mean to neglect this one."

"What do you mean, Nan-nan?"

His voice was awe-struck, she looked so excessively white and determined, so far removed from the influence of commonplace arguments.

"I mean just this," she said. She folded her white hands resolutely before her on the table, and looked him gravely in the face as she went on. "You are not to interrupt me, father, and you are not to try to turn

me. It would be absolutely useless. It was because I did not want to come to you in the first heat of my excitement, nor, in fact, until I had fully developed my plans, that you owe this anxious day. It never occurred to me that you might hear it all from Randall first."

Pursuing his policy of peacemaker blindly, Mr. Grayson here interrupted her violently.

"He said nothing harsh about you, Marianne. Be careful. Be just. I intend to be very impartial in this matter." He drew himself up magisterially.

"I wish you to be," she said, with a certain proud bitterness. "I am in Mr. Mackaye's way, father. I hamper him. I cannot administer flattery in judicious doses. I would rather not have discussed this matter with you at all, but I did not care to write about it, and I did not want you to be wearing yourself out anxiously conjecturing about me."

"Conjecturing about you? Haven't you come home to me?—to stay with me?"

"Most assuredly not. Fortunately, in the old days, when you anticipated leaving me to my own resources, you gave me something that will stand me in good stead now, father."

She did not tell him that it had stood Randall Mackaye in good stead these two years of their married life.

"My knowledge of painting, I mean. I can make a very good support. I came here to-day just to tell you good-bye, father, and to say I don't want you to let this make any difference between you and Mr. Mackaye. He depends very much upon your advice and criticism. It is useful to him. He needs it. He must have somebody to lean on—some *one* person who

will not administer flattery—some *one* friend to tell him the truth.”

The old man’s furrowed brow contracted angrily.

“You are bent on this mad step?—this wicked step?”

“I am.”

“And for no adequate reason?”

“I hamper him. I am going to leave him unhampered. I want to put matters to the test.”

Mr. Grayson got up and made the circuit of his cramped quarters several times before stopping in front of his daughter with his sternest face.

“Marianne,” he said, “when I left Mackaye’s studio this morning, it was with my heart full of wrath against him. I had nothing but condemnation in it for him and loving pity for you; but, hang me”—here he brought his withered hands violently together in his passionate pain—“since I’ve found you here, looking so unconcerned, and heard you discuss the matter so cold-bloodedly—hang me, if I don’t begin to pity Mackaye, and think it is more than half your fault.”

“It is all my fault,” said Marianne, getting up wearily and laying aside her work. “But, right or wrong, the step is taken. It cannot be retraced.”

She was straightening things in the room with mechanical neatness, her face like a piece of sculpture in its hardness.

“I had meant to say good-bye to you to-night, father, and to have asked you not to worry about me; but you stayed so late that I made down the sofa-bed in the studio for myself. I believe we had better both try to get some sleep.”

She stood before him with her hands on his shoulders, inviting a kiss, her white, upraised face strained and pleading.

"Where are you going, daughter?" He tried to say it kindly. Her suffering touched him very nearly.

"In yonder," she said, nodding her head towards the drawn curtains, behind which the sofa-bed stood ready to give her tired body the rest that heart and soul needed so much more acutely.

"I don't mean to-night," he answered, angrily. "I mean ultimately; at least, until your fit of the sulks has worn itself out."

How hard it was for the two men who should have known her best to grasp the tremendous underlying principle and indomitable will-power that lay at the bottom of this woman's every action!

"That is not for you to know. I do not want it to be in anyone's power to say that you are harboring a truant wife, father; but then—" she laughed bitterly—"not one of Randall's fashionable friends knows that he has a wife! Good-night, father."

Once more she held her lips up childishly for a kiss.

He stooped and kissed her lightly on the forehead. She turned away from him with a quivering lip and dropped the curtains between them.

"She will be all right in the morning," Mr. Grayson said, with calm conviction, as he made his own preparations for the night. "It would never have done to have sided with her. They made a mistake, a big mistake, but they must work out their own salvation. I shall give her a real scolding to-morrow. She looked too white and tired to-night."

But long before he was awake the next morning, Marianne had slipped out of the studio and gone away, leaving written on a paper-pad in pencil marks : "Don't worry about me, father. I shall do very well. Don't change towards Randall. It was all my fault. You shall hear from me if I am ill. MARIANNE."

The passengers on the very early ferry-boat coming from Hoboken to the city that morning looked with some curiosity at a tall, slender, thickly-veiled woman, who had walked straight through the cabin on coming aboard, and taken her stand against one of the short posts meant to stake off the passengers' deck from the teamsters' stand.

It was such a queer hour of the morning for a lady passenger ! She was the only woman aboard. The boat was full of rough day-laborers, going to the city to work. The only man there who was not armed with a tin dinner-pail, or burdened with tools of some sort, moved restlessly from one side of the cabin to the other, in an effort to keep that still, slim form in sight.

He had caught a glimpse of the ghastly, white face and the despairing eyes as she passed swiftly through the cabin and took her stand on the forward deck. She stood out there now, with her veil thrown back and her straining glance fixed upon the bay, over which lay a mantle of white mist, with an unseeing look. Who knew but what when they were mid-stream she might leap overboard to get rid forever of the misery that was making its presence felt, even to him, an utter stranger ?

He moved restlessly in his seat, then, leaving it alto-

gether, passed out through the glass doors and took his stand at a respectful distance from that motionless form. She would have to be very agile indeed to escape him, should she attempt anything rash.

Marianne, becoming aware of his espionage, turned a haughty glance in his direction. He did not see it. His gaze was fixed immovably on the square, red tower of the Produce-Exchange, as it loomed over the mist-capped greenery of the Battery. What she took in, in that one swift glance, was a tall, well-knit form enveloped in a light top-coat, a pair of gentle brown eyes, and a strong, square chin, overshadowed by a heavy black moustache. Not once, by any chance, did their eyes meet.

The boat glided into her slip. The workmen rushed tumultuously ashore with their tin-pails and tool-bags clattering about them. At a more leisurely gait Marianne followed, passed into the ferry-house, and was immediately swallowed up in the on-rushing stream of humanity that met her on the very threshold of the mighty city.

Her fellow-traveller waited for her to precede him. If she suspected him of espionage, he would relieve her at last. It took him quite a little while to button his top-coat across his broad chest. As he passed through the now empty cabin he saw something white on the floor. He stopped and picked up the photo of an old man. He remembered seeing a large card sticking prominently in view from the outside pocket of the satchel held by the one lady passenger on the boat, the woman he had been watching. "Scarcely a lover," he said, looking at the wrinkled, intellectual face

with curious interest, before putting the card in his pocket. "I wonder if I shall ever see her again? I shall remember her if I do. One does not meet a face like that twice in a lifetime."

Then he, too, was engulfed in the city's life.

The evening papers of that date contained an advertisement, which perhaps few ever read, and no one ever answered. This is it:

"If the lady who lost photo of old gentleman, on six o'clock ferry-boat, coming from Hoboken to city this morning, will call at the office of Dr. John Milbank, — 71st street, and prove property, she can recover it."

CHAPTER IX.

“You see, Mackaye, I am a trifle hampered when it comes to entertaining my friends decently at home.”

Mr. Lenox was waxing confidential. He and the sculptor were alone in the dining-room at the close of the Thursday's dinner to which Randall had been invited. There were a box of cigars and a bottle of wine between them on the table. He leaned over to fill Randall's glass once more. The sculptor made a faint protest, then yielded.

Randall Mackaye's protests against the seductive things of life were faint (or feint).

“Afraid? Nonsense! It is a little heady, but you haven't taken enough to hurt a sick baby yet.”

Evidently Mr. Lenox's idea of entertaining his friends “decently” embodied frequent recourse to the wine-bottle. It never occurred to him that habitual (enforced) abstemiousness might make indulgence dangerous to his guest.

“Yes, as I was saying, I'm a trifle hampered. I generally have my own friends up to the League to dinner. By-the-way, put me down for next Thursday at the Club. I want to introduce you to some fellows who've got lots more money than brains. This is Miss Lenox's domain. My little girl is too young to be put at the head of a table full of men. Her position, too, is a little peculiar. No mother. My dear wife left us for

a better world two years ago. Nothing in the woman line but Hildah. Hildah's a good woman. God never made a better one—but—well—Hildah—is Hildah."

Mr. Lenox laughed indulgently, filled the glasses again, and listened politely to Randall's fervent asseveration that nothing could have been more delightful than the little family dinner they had just disposed of. It was so kind to admit him thus into the home circle.

"Yes, but I take it you're not one of the domestic sort. You artists are generally Bohemians. However, you must stay and finish out the evening with Jeanne and Hildah. This is Jeanne's at-home. She gets rather a queer lot together. You see, Jeanne's position is rather trying. She's too young for her mother's old set. They are inclined to patronize her, and the little monkey has ruled me with a rod of iron so long that she don't accept patronage very meekly from anybody. She wouldn't from Queen Vic."

Just here Jeanne's bright face was suddenly framed in the dining-room door, and her voice came to them in a little authoritative command.

"Papa, if you are going to get any advice from Mr. Mackaye about your pictorial Noah's Ark, I wish you would go now. Aunt Hildah and I will want him to help us presently."

"All right, my tyrant. Come, Mackaye. I keep the Ark, but she entertains the animals. Jeanne gets a regular menagerie together every Thursday."

Jeanne laughed, then turned toward Randall with the daintiest possible frown puckering her smooth white forehead.

“At-homes are dreadful. Don’t you think so?”

Randall reminded her of his limited opportunities of judging, at which she blushed in delicious confusion. She had never meant to permit the faintest allusion to any difference in their social status.

“Ah, you are a stranger here yet awhile. Wait until this winter, and you will be bored out of your existence.”

“You see,” she went on rapidly, blushing vividly at his gallant assurance that he should escape boredom by only going where he was sure to meet her, “Aunt Hildah and papa make my at-homes so dreadfully difficult. Papa runs away entirely, as a general thing, and Aunt Hildah—poor, dear, patient Aunt Hildah—she sits behind the tea-things for all the world as if she were dispensing tea at a church-fair, for so much a cup, and was afraid she’d get the change wrong if she permitted conversation.”

“Hildah was born in Connecticut, educated in New Hampshire, and has spent the larger portion of a pure and blameless existence in New Jersey,” said Mr. Lenox, explanatorily.

“You sha’n’t make fun of Aunt Hildah!” Jeanne turned on him with charming inconsistency. “She is true gold at bottom. But you will stay and help me with all those stupid people to-night, Mr. Mac-kaye?”

“Of course he will. I’ll fetch him myself presently. Set Miss Cheney on to him, Jeanne. She’ll tell him more about art in half a minute than he could learn by a lifetime of arduous application; and the cornetist—no, the flutist, will he be here to-night?”

“They’ll all be here to-night,” said Jeanne, with her rippling, girlish laugh. “They know this is my last until in the fall.” She took a tiny diamond-studded watch from some hidden recess about her lace bodice. “Papa, I will give you just one half-hour for the pictures. After that, Mr. Mackaye belongs to me.”

She threw him a daring look and fluttered out of sight. Randall followed his host in the opposite direction, towards the long wing-room which the Wall Street man had converted into a receptacle for all the pictures and statues and so-called works of art that had been accruing to several generations of Lenoxes.

“You know, Mr. Mackaye,” Jeanne’s father said, stopping in front of a huge canvas, after they had made a slow circuit of the gallery, “as a rule we city men make egregious asses of ourselves whenever we undertake to buy pictures. There’s a lot of bare space here to be filled, and I’ve just got sense enough to know that I don’t know anything about this sort of thing,” waving his hand comprehensively; “that is,” as if repenting of his humility, “I think I know a fine thing when I see it, but these picture-dealers have such an infernal gift of the gab that they can talk an easy-going fellow into buying a picture, whether he likes it or not.”

Randall admitted that the craft were not above tricks of the trade.

“So I need a supervisor, you perceive.” Thus, under the flimsiest veil of necessity, did Jeanne’s father attempt to keep his promise to her, and help this struggling native genius. “I want you to fill that space for me. Take your own time. Make your own

selection. In the meantime draw on me for commissions as soon as you please."

It was well-meant and kindly done. Nevertheless Randall Mackaye winced under it most unreasonably. Jeanne's father placed a friendly hand on his arm.

"Now, then, my dear fellow, I'm under bonds to hand you over to the women. After all, they are the ones to float a fellow. I've got to meet some men at the club at half-past eight—some fellows from Albany who are only in town for a day. You will excuse me."

He had been convoyed as far as the back parlor by Mr. Lenox, then Jeanne had come and taken possession of him with a little triumphant smile.

"You won't find it like Mrs. Rockwood's at-home," she said, laying her small gloved hand on his arm. "Mrs. Rockwood's at-homes are perfect. Don't you think so?"

"I never attended but one, and then you were there. Of course it was perfect."

He hated himself for the space of half a second after these vapid, empty words had escaped his lips, the girl by his side sent such a shy, sweet glance upward to him, and the red had come so swiftly into her smooth young cheeks.

It was with a curious feeling of personal discomfort and harsh resentmentsurging up in him that he went mechanically through no end of introductions to the rather callow brood that Jeanne had collected about her, before taking refuge near Miss Hildah, who stood entirely too much in awe of anybody who could *do anything*, even to raise her mild blue eyes towards the spot where

“Jeanne’s artist” stood leaning gracefully against the blue-velvet mantel lambrequin, asking himself all sorts of spiteful questions.

Why was Fate perpetually throwing this girl across his pathway? Why was the girl herself such a tantalizingly charming bit of humanity that it was almost impossible to be near her without an uncontrollable desire to say something caressing, to do something rash? Why was he so constituted that he *must* be ministered to with smiles and tender words? Why had Marianne chosen to absent herself at this particular juncture, flinging him back on himself just as he was getting a foothold among these people? Finally—after all, what was Jerome Lenox’s liberal hospitality but a piece of class insolence? He had held out his hand, with a promise of gold in it, to an obscure sculptor, who, as a man, was absolutely innocuous to his daughter, born in the purple, and hedged securely about with social boundary lines and family traditions.

As he stood leaning against the mantelpiece, sipping the cup of tea which Jeanne had just brought him with her own hands and presented with one of those sweet, shy glances he loved so to provoke, he was seized with an infernal desire to put to route the insolent security of the father, and win for himself the utmost this child-woman had to offer to any man.

Who could blame him? This intimacy was not of his seeking! Moreover—would it not be for her happiness?

Where was his deranged fancy conducting him? Far, very far from the low-ceiled, luxurious drawing-room, where he saw, as in a dream, Miss Hildah sitting

rigidly behind the tea-things, making heroic efforts to entertain an unhappy-looking young man, whose fatuous smiles were entirely at variance with the hungry gaze that followed Jeanne, as she flitted gayly from one group to the other, trying vainly to infuse some of her own vitality into the incongruous material that made up her at-home.

He saw and heard it all, in a hazy fashion. Somebody sang, and he helped applaud him or her (?) Somebody recited something. He could never recall what it was, only, as it seemed to excite mild merriment from Jeanne's well-bred guests, he indulged in a moderate amount of smiling as his contribution.

The room was growing intolerably hot, the perfume of flowers and extracts overpowering. He wandered back to the picture-gallery. Softly-shaded lamps were burning in various parts of the long room. He passed a mirror. Something in his own appearance struck him as peculiar. He stopped to survey himself deliberately. The man in the glass seemed to fling an accusation at him :

"Randall Mackaye, you are an infernal scoundrel, not fit to breathe the air of Jeanne Lenox's home. Go home before you let the villainy in your soul escape at your lips."

It was good advice ! He turned to obey it. A gurgle of triumphant laughter floated towards him. Jeanne was coming swiftly towards him with outstretched hands.

"Aunt Hildah said you had gone home, bored to death. But I thought I should find you here. Papa had no business to fill your mind with business this

evening. You are mine for to-night. Stop thinking about these blank spaces."

She looked up at him coquettishly. Her hand was in his. It lay there passively as he looked down at her with burning eyes. The remnant of the thing he called his conscience made one of its feeblest efforts to be heard.

"I think I had better not go back to the drawing-room, Miss Lenox. There is some work crying out in my studio for my presence. Let me make my adieux here. I have had a charming evening."

"You have had nothing of the sort," said Jeanne, with her most irresistible pout, "and if you go away now, I shall think—"

"Think what?"

His voice was thick. His burning gaze held her fascinated—enthralled.

"That—you—do—not—like—me."

She said it slowly and daringly, never once dropping her eyes. It was almost a challenge.

"Child, you don't know what you are saying! You don't know what you are doing."

He caught her in his arms. He drew her close to him, pressed one long, clinging kiss upon her pure young lips, then, holding her from him at arm's length, his passionate excitement culminated in a question asked with brutal directness :

"Jeanne, do you love me?"

The answer came to him in a fluttering sigh, scarcely audible above the stormy beating of his own heart. She stood before him with shy, downcast eyes :

"Yes—you know—I do."

"God help you, little one!"

It came from him with a groan. He flung her hands from him with passionate impatience, passed swiftly out of the gallery, found his hat, and left the house, without even glancing towards the drawing-room, where he could still hear the inane chatter of Jeanne's guests.

Jeanne stood where he had left her, plunged in a delicious maze of gratified vanity, bewilderment at her lover's sudden departure, and a host of other novel sensations. Then she settled it all with her usual prompt decision, holding her hands the while to her hot cheeks.

"Poor fellow, he is afraid of papa. That is all. He thinks rich men are all ogres, and he is about to be devoured by one. He is a tempest. I adore him!"

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Randall Mackaye opened his eyes the next morning he found himself stared in the face by two excessively disagreeable facts: he had enacted the double role of fool and knave, on his first appearance as Jerome Lenox's guest; and he had a splitting headache.

Perhaps, if his physical discomfort had been less, his moral compunction might have been greater. As it was, he flung himself desperately out of bed and plunged his disordered head into cold water. In the midst of his ablutions the memory of certain previous periods of pain came back to him—periods when he had been ministered unto by a white-handed woman, skilled of touch and ready of sympathy. But these memories only served to inflame his wrath to a higher pitch.

"It is a deuced bore," he reflected, viciously rubbing his curly head with a big towel the while, "to have to look out for one's self, at any time; worse than a deuced bore to go stumbling about like a horse with the blind staggers, hunting for clean things. When Mrs. Mackaye does put in an appearance I shall settle things on a firmer basis."

The possibility of Marianne's never returning to him had not, up to that time, entered the egotist's mind. He had quickly disposed of the alarm aroused by finding

that she was not in Hoboken : "She has gone to visit that sickly old cousin of hers, up about Lake George somewhere, who is always writing for her. Doubtless she is enjoying her outing, while I am fuming about her."

In dressing-gown and slippers he sat down to "face the situation." It so chanced that he also faced "Love's Young Dream," when, flinging himself into the most comfortable chair in the room, the finished plaster model stood draped in its ghostly sheet, behind a curtain. Nearer by, the unfinished work in marble depressed him with its suggestions of idleness, lack of purpose, and other unpleasant things. It was almost as if Marianne herself had turned her head away from him in cold disdain of him as he was. He had seen her assume just that attitude so often.

From the beginning he had worked on his masterpiece in his own erratic fashion. The head, with its rounded neck, was almost finished. One arm, terminating in an exquisitely moulded hand, was entirely finished. The cold, impassive fingers lay rigidly against the unshaped mass that was to be chiselled into drapery.

In his rare moments of feverish impatience to see this, "*the work of his life*," completed, he had sometimes contemplated following the example of his craft and turning model and all over to a mason to be finished. But his finer instincts recoiled against it. And Marianne, too, had recoiled from the suggestion. The work had been conceived and the plaster model executed during their honeymoon, when love's young dream was a blissful daily actuality to them both.

That proud little head, turned slightly sidewise, was

Marianne's head. That round, swelling throat, hers. Those full, sloping shoulders; the softly-springing bust; the perfect arm, tapering down to the faultless wrist and hand, were hers—all hers. It was not as if a hireling model had furnished all that entrancing beauty. He could not call in the aid of the fellow who had "chopped out" his Psyche. This work must be his alone, from the beginning to the end. So he had settled it long ago.

The modelling had been a delight, the copying was torture. Patient diligence was not his forte.

As he sat there that morning, racked with pain, he was close enough to the statue to put out one feverish hand and touch its cold, white, unresponsive fingers. He drew his hand back with a nervous laugh.

"Confound the thing! If I stay shut up with it here much longer alone it will give me the horrors. Better make a finish of it and get it out of sight."

Not then, though. He had not the remotest idea of lifting hammer or chisel until he felt better.

He rang for a messenger-boy and ordered in some breakfast. When it came he felt in his side-pocket for the bills that Marianne had enclosed in her letter, and paid for it. He would rather not have been reduced to the vulgar necessity of using that money, but as he was, there was no reason why it should mar his appetite for the breakfast it had procured him.

He made a virtuous effort to take himself to task while dawdling over his late meal. He had acted shabbily at Lenox's. How should he retrieve himself? Tell the girl he was a married man, who, under the influence of her father's "heady" wine, had forgotten

himself and stolen a kiss? Invite a cowhiding from Jeanne's father?—or so play his cards that the Lenox doors would still be open to him and poor little Jeanne be kept from tears?

Plainly the latter alternative was the most sensible.

"A trifle risky? Yes; but life without a spice of danger in it is so infernally slow."

He was planning the next step in his social campaign with careful deliberation, resolving to make up for past blunders by extreme future caution, when an interruption came.

Somebody knocked, and in answer to his permission to enter, a tall form loomed in the doorway, and the scent of roses was wafted to him. He turned his head languidly, and then stood up, looking pleased and surprised.

"Chiltern? Why, I thought you had been out of town this month past. Hold on! let me see if I can find accommodation for you and that gorgeous bunch of roses. My room is not always in this wrecked condition."

"The bunch of roses you will have to accommodate. They are for you, and I'm glad enough to get rid of them. With your permission I'll accommodate myself here in this jolly window-seat."

"For me?" said Randall, taking up the bunch of roses his visitor had thrown down on the table, with a stare of genuine surprise.

"Yes, for you. It's a great thing to be the coming man, rising luminary, and all that sort of thing. There's where you art fellows get the better of us poor limbs of the law, especially when you happen to supple-

ment the artistic temperament with a Byronic head and a Garibaldian mustache. Who would ever think of sending me floral tributes?"

"That is a fact. You *are* a lawyer," said Randall, looking at him reflectively.

Chiltern's nonsense went for nothing. He was an "effusive boy." A good-natured one, however, who, Randall was quite sure, had persuaded his mother to purchase his *Psyche* at a fancy price. Perhaps on the present occasion he might extract some legal points from the young counsellor.

His gravity had a sobering effect on the laughing boy in the window seat. He fixed his clear, blue eyes on Randall's pale face with kindly interest.

"You look rather seedy, old fellow. Working too hard, I guess. Mother sent you those roses, and told me to say that she is going to have a lot of nice girls out at our place next week, and she wants you to come and help entertain them."

"Thanks for the roses—and for the invitation."

"Oh, as for the roses, they take the earth out yonder in June, and as for the invitation, the thanks, if you accept, will come from us."

Randall looked at him meditatively. Dolly's attachment for himself was one of the queerest of his town experiences. His visitor was scarcely more than a boy, a slender, handsome, manly young fellow, who had been so closely watched and warded by his woman-kind, that association with Randall Mackaye had seemed to open a delightful door of escape into the Bohemia for which his inexperienced soul panted.

It would have been better for Jeanne Lenox if the rigid

cordon of propriety that so chafed Adolphus Chiltern could have been drawn around her instead.

"I'd like to live this way," said Dolly, sucking the head of his cane, and staring about him with bright, interested eyes.

"Then you must be naturally a depraved wretch," said Randall, laughing. "I call this living like a dog. Everything's in a confounded mess."

The studio missed Marianne's dainty supervision.

"If it is," said Dolly, discontentedly, "it's living like a free dog. I live like one of those pop-eyed, bow-legged pugs, sleek and well-fed, but some woman or other's always got hold of the other end of my chain, and I've got to go just the way they pull."

"How many 'theys' are there?" Randall asked, soothingly. Not that he was very much interested in the answer, but he was meditating putting a legal question to Dolly presently, and he wanted to keep him there until the question had formulated itself clearly to his own intelligence.

"Five," said Dolly, in an injured tone. "One mother, two aunts, and two sisters. What chance has a fellow among such a lot of petticoats?"

"Chance for what?" Randall asked, with a certain virtuous sternness in his voice that Dolly found impressive.

"Chance to make a man of himself."

"It depends on what sort of a man you want to make of yourself."

"Oh, well, I don't want to make a beast of myself. I hate nasty things. And I don't think I'd want to lie, gamble, or drink, even if I were left to my own devices.

But, then—oh, well, hang it—a fellow don't like to have to give an account of himself, you know, five times over."

Randall laughed, and Dolly joined in with light-hearted recognition of his own absurdity. Then, with an impulse quite unaccountable to himself, the older man came over and stood where he could look straight down into the boy's clear, frank eyes.

"Dolly, there are all sorts of chains in this world, and all sorts of dogs tugging at them, but I think, if I had to take my chances over again, I'd like to feel that my chain was firmly in the grasp of something—somebody—stronger and better than my own weak self."

"Say that over again," said Dolly, in his eager young voice. "I want to remember it verbatim."

"Why?"

"Well, you see"—he shifted one long leg restlessly across the other and back again, before finishing his sentence—"you see, mother's the best woman in the world. There's no question about that, but she *is* strait-laced, and she was a little afraid of you, you know."

"Afraid of me?"

"Yes, this way, you know. I guess I have talked a lot of stuff about you, and she was afraid I was getting fond of one of those Bohemians, don't you know—who have not any moral sense, don't you see. But that idea of yours will fetch her, you know. You're not angry with me! I thought I'd like you to know, so that when you come out, if mother seems to be studying you, you know, you'll understand."

"Yes, I understand," said Randall, absently. He was engaged just then in drawing a contrast between

the piquant daring of Jeanne Lenox and the girlish timidity of Adolphus Chiltern.

“You’ll come,” said Dolly, rising and towering above the sculptor by a whole inch. “You’ll come to help me through,” he added, urgently, watching Randall’s face solicitously. “Mother never has any but the nicest girls out. You know, she and the aunts empanel a committee and sit on them. They are going to marry me off some day, in spite of myself, to the wrong girl, of course.” He laughed helplessly.

“Who, for instance, are some of the nice girls that will be with you week after next?”

“Oh, I don’t know. About a dozen. That’s mother’s idea of ‘making home happy’ for me. Miss Jeanne Lenox for one. Ever seen her?”

Randall winced; his answer was lost in Dolly’s flow of eloquence.

“Now, she’s real nice. A regular little high-stepper, and as jolly as you please. She makes fun for the whole house when she comes.”

“Then, perhaps, after all,” said Randall, impelled to say something, “the chain will be pulled in the right direction this time.”

“That chain is in Miss Lenox’s hand,” said Dolly, with boyish chivalry, “and she won’t be pulled about by anybody. But, ’pon honor, I never meant to have consumed but five minutes of your valuable time.”

“My time is not very valuable this morning. I’ve been fighting a headache. By-the-way, Chiltern, didn’t I understand, from somebody, that you had passed your examination very creditably, and was prepared to practice law this coming winter?”

"I don't know about the creditable examination," said Dolly, a pink flush mounting into his smooth, beardless cheeks, "but I am a so-called lawyer. Have taken desk room with old Judge Hallam Foote. You know I *must* be under somebody's wing."

"Then maybe you can give me the law in a certain imaginary case. I don't know that I ought to call it imaginary, either. I will be very frank with you, Dolly; of course trusting entirely to your honor for secrecy."

"That of course without saying," said Dolly, proudly.

After a moment's hesitation Randall began: "I have a friend in Vermont who has come to grief in a domestic way recently."

He paused for half a second, perhaps overcome with a sense of his own contemptible perfidy. Dolly stood, hat in hand, politely interested.

"He had married, from pure love, a woman who afterwards turned out to be something of a shrew. She left him on a very slight provocation, and my poor friend writes to me for advice as to what steps to take in the matter."

"Does he want her back?" Dolly asked, his blue eyes fixed inquiringly on the pale face before him.

"That—I—am—not—quite sure about."

"Well, it all depends on that," said Dolly, glibly. He was quite willing to give unfeed advice in the matter of this domestic tragedy. "If he wants her back, I suppose all he's got to do is, metaphorically, of course, to go on his knees to her."

"My friend is not much given to genuflection. Moreover, he does not know where she is."

“Desertion! A clear case of desertion! In that case all he has to do is to summon her to return a certain number of times, and, in case of refusal, after five years the law presumes her dead, and he is a free man—free to marry again.”

“A free man! Five years! Jeanne is very young.”

Randall repeated the words to himself over and over again. Free to enjoy all the nice, soft things Fortune was flinging in his way with such unexpected lavishness! Free to claim his place in that glittering social circle into which he fitted so comfortably and so naturally! Free—if he so willed it—to finally marry Jeanne Lenox! To Chiltern his only response was an indifferent—

“Ah, well, I don’t know why I have bothered you with this tempest in a tea-pot, but I was going to write to this friend of mine this morning, and as the poor fellow had asked for my advice, I wanted to be able to give it to him intelligently. Thanks to you, I can do so now.”

Dolly flushed with pride as he held out his hand.

“Glad to be of the slightest service to any friend of yours. Ta-ta. I can tell mother you will come?”

“Don’t promise for me, Chiltern. Thank her, and tell her if I can get away from my gallery I will be only too happy.”

“You do look confoundedly done up,” said Dolly, kindly. “I think you’ll find a tonic in our country air, to say nothing of the girls.”

He was gone, and Randall Mackaye turned away from the last gaze of his clear young eyes with an in-

tolerable sense of unworthiness weighing him down. He wondered bitterly why Fate had not supplied him with all the good things of this world, and given him a lot of women to keep him from going astray.

“I needed them more than Dolly did. That boy’s soul is clean to the very bottom.”

Mrs. Chiltern’s roses were scenting the air. Mrs. Chiltern’s invitation was tempting him to risk a whole week under the same roof with Jeanne Lenox. Why should he not take each day’s luxury as it was offered to him, and stop trying to straighten out the “accursed snarl of Marianne’s making”?

Always some one outside of himself to shift the burden of blame upon!

The bunch of roses recalled a promise forgotten up to that second. Had he not taken Jeanne’s roses from her on the night of Mrs. Rockwood’s at-home, with a promise that she should have them back in more lasting shape? He had left those roses on a bench in Washington Square—but these would do quite as well.

A few moments later, with a small canvas in front of him, and his water-colors spread out around him, he was transferring Mrs. Chiltern’s roses to canvas, and formulating a satisfactory explanation of his tardiness in the matter for Miss Lenox’s benefit.

CHAPTER XI.

“MISS LENOX is difficult this morning, and I am in despair.”

It looked much more like temper than despair. Florence laid the ivory brush down with an emphatic thud on Miss Lenox’s dressing-table, after flourishing it wildly for half a second over the wilful little head of her mistress. Jeanne looked at her reproachfully in the mirror.

“*Florence!* I really believe you would like to thump me over the head with that brush, as disagreeable nursery-maids do spoilt children.”

“Miss Lenox *is* a spoilt child,” said the maid, folding her arms, and looking defiance into Jeanne’s reflected eyes.

“Florence!”

The pronunciation and intonation were distinctly Saxon this time.

“I repeat—Mademoiselle is extremely difficult this morning.”

Jeanne leaned placidly forward to scrutinize the arrangement of fluffy curls about her white forehead, which she and her maid had just come to grief over.

“I am not any more difficult than usual. I always like to look nice for my own sake—and—and—for papa’s.”

Florence's thin nostrils dilated with scorn, but no audible rejoinder escaped her bloodless lips.

"But this morning," Jeanne went on, ruthlessly pulling out a myriad of hair-pins and sowing them broadcast over carpet, chairs, toilet-stand, "you seem spitefully bent on making a perfect guy of me."

"It is not in the hair; it is in the loss of sleep. Emotion does not make women beautiful," said Florence, with calm insolence. "Miss Lenox is not well this morning."

Jeanne looked at her in wild alarm. How much did she know? How much did she guess? After all, French maids were horrid things. She drew herself up with the most imposing austerity, and said, slowly:

"Florence, I think I want you to go away."

Florence shrugged her angular shoulders impatiently.

"Entirely away, Miss? Out of the house? Out of Miss Lenox's service?"

"Yes," with an imperious stamp of a small foot; "entirely away, out of the house, out of my service. You make yourself detestable lately."

"Detestable! *Mon Dieu*, I am discretion itself."

"Discretion!"

"Miss Lenox needs a discreet person near her."

"What do you mean?" Jeanne asked, with flashing eyes and hot cheeks.

"Just this," said Florence, catching the girl's trembling little hands in hers, and laying a long, brown, insolent finger first on one wrist, then on the other.

Jeanne's eyes dropped in confusion. Upon the soft, white flesh of either arm a circular reddish indentation was plainly visible. She had worn her bracelets with

the antique cameo clasps the night before. "Mr. Mackaye had admired them at Mrs. Rockwood's." When he had drawn her towards him in that swift, passionate moment, yonder in the picture-gallery, he had held her tightly by the wrists, pressing the sharp gold clasps into the tender flesh. She remembered now, for the first time, that it had hurt her then—but what was that fleeting pain by comparison with the inrushing joy of knowing that he loved her? She drew the lace of her sleeve quickly over the faint red spots.

Florence was smiling into her perturbed face with calm malice. "This child must be quelled," the maid told herself. "Mademoiselle should keep her adorers at a greater distance. Those marks are disfiguring. Permit me. Monsieur need not have been so tempestuous."

She brought her jar of cold cream and quietly applied it to Jeanne's wrists. The girl stood cowed and trembling before her. All the dubious tales that Florence had to tell of previous mistresses rushed into her memory with startling distinctness. How could she tell but what Florence might manufacture some equally dubious tale concerning herself, in case of a rupture? Plainly it would be best to placate her maid. Poor little friendless Jeanne! A fluttering dove in the merciless clutch of a hawk!

"Florence," she said, resuming her chair in front of the mirror with the docility of a conquered child, "try my hair again, do; that's a good girl."

Florence took up the comb and brush as if the mysteries of the toilette had never been interrupted: "Then Miss Lenox does not dismiss me?"

“And—Florence,” not answering directly, “if you think you can alter that jet mantle to fit your shoulders, you can have it. The one you like so much, you know.”

The peace thus purchased left Florence, the maid, more strongly intrenched than ever in a position she had never meditated abandoning for a second. While Jeanne—

Well, Jeanne had a delightful diversion before her toilette was quite complete. A package and a note were handed in. The package contained the freshest and daintiest of water-color sketches.

“My roses! look, Florence! Isn’t it too lovely?”

Florence silently regarded the sketch with critical eyes. She was quite sure this artist lover of Miss Lenox’s was a fraud. Her young lady had worn full-blown “American Beauties” that night, and here was a lot of—the Lord only knew what. She doubted whether he had painted them at all. She would make it her business to inform herself concerning monsieur, the artist. All this to herself, of course.

Jeanne was fluttering about her desk. There was a note to be answered—a note, in which Randall Mackaye asked if he might call on Miss Lenox between the hours of two and three. He feared he might be encroaching on her visiting hours, but, under the circumstances, hoped she would pardon and receive him.

With a tremendous sense of guilt throbbing at her pure little heart, Jeanne devised an errand to her dress-maker, which should take Florence down-town at the precise time Randall Mackaye should be coming up-town. She had made a humiliating discovery. She was afraid of Florence.

“As if,” she said to herself, combatively, “no one ever received a lover alone before!”

So it came about that Florence was safely out of the way when Jeanne received Randall Mackaye in the long parlor, where the rich portieres and the lace curtains at the windows fell in the long, straight folds so dear to the lovers of privacy.

“Not at home to anyone else.”

Miss Lenox had given this order imperiously to the footman who had brought Randall's card to her on a salver. Then she swept into the sculptor's presence and, with a great, but very shallow pretence of being entirely at her ease, rushed into a shockingly crude but altogether flattering criticism of the water-sketches roses.

Randall heard her through with a patience which was not as commendable as it looked. He was gathering strength for the next act in this “society drama.”

“Miss Lenox,” he said, abruptly, and there was a creditable tremor in his voice, “I came here to say something which had best be said in as few words as possible.”

“Yes?”

They were sitting opposite each other, Jeanne on a low divan, he in a curiously constructed piece of upholstery, which made him feel as if he ought to be stationed in a corner, instead of squarely in front of that girl, whose clear eyes were rather discomposing. She had dropped them upon her folded hands now, though, and seemed absorbed in contemplation of the jewelled rings which adorned them, twisting them about aimlessly.

"Yes," Randall went on, a trifle more smoothly, leaning forward and touching a floating ribbon among her draperies. "I had no right to ask you to receive me this morning. But I wanted to tell you something; *must* tell you something, in fact."

Again that faint "Yes?" tremulous and soft from Jeanne's red lips, smote upon the silent room.

"I am an in—an unmitigated scoundrel, Jeanne—Miss Lenox—and deserve to be ordered from your presence as you would order an insolent lackey who had put an affront upon you."

Jeanne looked at him with disturbed, incredulous eyes.

"I—do—not—understand you!"

"Of course you don't. How can you? I don't understand myself." It was stupid, but he was befogged.

She leaned forward with a divine pity in her clear, young eyes.

"You—are—afraid of papa." Then pity was put to flight by an archly encouraging smile.

A ghastly palor overspread Randall's handsome face.

"He—he—does not know—anything?"

"No—I—there—was nothing for me to tell him. You—"

"True—true! You could hardly have told him that he had entertained a villain at dinner, and that you had been insulted by that villain afterwards."

"Insulted?" She drew her slim form up to its utmost capacity. She looked him straight in the eyes. A certain chill had come into her voice. She seemed in a second to have put him at an immeasurable distance.

But the egotist before her had planned every step in this interview carefully before leaving his studio. He was not to be thrown off his cue by that sudden up-flaming of her wrath, which only enhanced her beauty distractingly.

“Yes, insulted. Is it not an insult for a man in my position, a poor, unknown, obscure modeller of clay and chipper of marble, to raise longing eyes to Jerome Lenox’s daughter? Is it not an insult for a man absolutely debarred from even the possibility of asking a woman to be his wife to permit his passion for that woman to override his prudence? Is it not an insult for a man to pour meaningless words of love into a girl’s ear and to extort from her avowals that can lead to nothing, as I extorted them from you last evening, my poor little Jeanne?”

“‘Meaningless words’?—‘lead to nothing’?”

She picked those two phrases out of the speech he had delivered with headlong impetuosity, and repeated them over and over again, as if she were trying to translate them into something understandable

“Meaningless words?—lead to nothing?”

He repeated them himself, with a certain dogged insistence: “Yes, meaningless words that can lead to nothing.”

“Why?” she asked him, abruptly, dashing her hand across her eyes, as if clearing away a physical mist.

“Because I never can—I never intend to repeat one word of all the stuff I poured into your innocent ears last night, until I am in a position to face your father, and say to him, ‘Jerome Lenox, by the help of my own strong right arm I have carved out a position that

you cannot look down upon.' It may be a long time before I can do it, Jeanne. Two years—perhaps three—perhaps longer—perhaps never. Until then——”

He stood up and held out his hand. He considered he had conducted the interview with considerable skill. The girl before him was fluttering and flushing with an access of love and admiration. She, too, stood up and held out both hands. She was looking up into his face with shy, true eyes.

“Until then?”

“Until then, good-bye. I must not stand in the way of some more fortunate man. I will not hamper you.”

“Until then,” she said, dropping her eyes and speaking very softly but quite distinctly, “I—will—wait. There will be no other—fortunate man. What are two years?—three?—four? You will be great—and—I—shall be proud of you. Father likes you now.”

He could have drawn her to him again. He could have sealed her rash promise with another guilty kiss. There was invitation in her attitude. He credited himself afterwards with a sternly virtuous purpose. He dropped her hands and turned away from her with a long-drawn, genuine sigh.

The trying interview was over, and instead of losing ground with her he had taken position on a much higher plane. He was quite safe until his legal shackles should be knocked off by the majestic arm of the law. He dropped her hands and turned away, leaving her standing there, with bright, trustful, hopeful eyes turned full upon his retreating figure.

When he got back to the studio his patience was

sorely tried. He had to touch the electric button to the elevator a third and a fourth time before he could discover any motion in the machinery. It descended slowly. As the door finally slid back, a tall, dark woman stepped into the corridor, and brushing swiftly past him, walked rapidly towards the entrance. She had given him one piercing look from a pair of fierce black eyes in passing, a look so full of malignity that the sculptor was impelled to ask :

“ Who is that woman ? ”

“ Somebody for the janitor,” the elevator boy answered. “ ’Twas her that kept me waiting so long.”

It was in vain that Randall tried to recall when and where he had before seen that tall, spare figure, and those peculiarly fierce black eyes. He could not fit them to the woman who, on the night when Jeanne Lenox had driven him home from Mrs. Rockwood’s, had opened the carriage door on the side towards the square and seated herself in the coupé, for he had not looked beyond Jeanne’s face.

Florence had been very busy that morning. She had interviewed Miss Lenox’s dressmaker and Mr. Mackaye’s janitor, and now she was going home, flushed with a sense of achievement.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE of the five females whose mission in life it was, according to Dolly Chiltern, to hold him well in leash, were sitting upon the eastern veranda of the country house to which that young gentleman had recently invited his friend the sculptor with such cordial insistence.

They were Mrs. Chiltern and her two unmarried sisters, the Misses Patterson. The other two guardians of Dolly's morals and manners were engaged elsewhere just then, laboring over the entertainment of a rather crude lot of girls, whom they were trying to interest in old-world photographs in the absence of new-world beaux.

The female sex was always unduly prominent in Mrs. Chiltern's gatherings. Not that the men were purposely excluded, but Chilternhurst was not a popular house with Dolly's town friends. They liked him best at the club, or in his rooms, or on the mall.

There was a certain unconscious austerity about Mrs. Chiltern that inspired them with awe. This, added to the avowed prejudice of all five of Dolly's guardians to the use of tobacco, even in its most respectable forms, conspired to multiply the excuses and the regrets of the invited men.

This season Dolly's sisters found bitter cause of com-

plaint against him for his unblushing tendency to devote himself to one particular girl. It made the others "a load to carry."

No one could have felt the slightest hesitancy in deciding which of the three women on the veranda was Dolly's mother. All three were similarly engaged at that moment with balls of worsted and big ivory crochet-needles, the only difference being that one ball of worsted was red, another yellow, the third blue. The morning was bright, the skies overhead were blue. The spots of vivid color out on the sloping lawn showed that the dahlias and geraniums were doing all that could be required of them; and, apart from the chronic consideration of Dolly's future, life was an altogether pleasant and placid affair for the ladies of Chilternhurst.

Dolly's mother was tall and slender, and, having gone permanently into mourning on the decease of Dolly's father, there was a sort of monumental stateliness about her that was quite impressive. She was a serious-looking matron, with a shrewd eye and a firm mouth, to say nothing of her nose, which was of the type which goes much farther towards establishing its possessor's claim to dignity than volumes of verbal testimony to that fact.

She had just finished reading a letter aloud to her sisters, and was debating whether she should call across the lawn to Dolly, and convey its contents to him immediately.

He was in full view of them, just on the other side of the tennis-court. His long legs were stretched comfortably on the vivid close-clipped grass, his bright tennis-cap reposed, with his head inside of it, movelessly against

the red arm of an iron lawn-seat. His arms were folded across his broad, full chest. Above him sat Jeanne Lenox, her face entirely hidden from view by a huge straw hat-brim. There was an open book in her lap, and the presumption was that she was reading Dolly to sleep, or had already done so, so motionless was the long, lithe body on the grass at her feet.

"I think I wouldn't disturb them," said Miss Emily Patterson, laying down a shapeless mass of wool-work, to glance across at Dolly. "They look very comfortable, and luncheon will soon be ready."

Miss Emily Patterson had an embodied echo in her sister, Miss Maria Patterson, so it was only necessary to secure the opinion of one to grasp the convictions of the other, (Dolly was much given to this sort of condensation). Miss Maria echoed promptly on this occasion :

"Yes, luncheon will soon be ready, and they do look so cosy, you know, that I think that I wouldn't disturb them. No, I wouldn't disturb them."

Miss Maria, indeed all five of Dolly's guardians, were fully aware of the condition of his heart. Nothing could have fitted in better with their own individual and aggregate desires. Jeanne Lenox had been fully and frequently discussed in the abstract, and with a view to her fitness for Adolphus.

(No one of the five, unless, indeed, occasionally his sister Anna, the youngest of the family, ever called him Dolly. But, then, Anna had always been a trifle frivolous.)

"Jeanne was a thoroughly well-principled girl.

"Jeanne was bright and practical, while Adolphus

was inclined to be run away with by his enthusiasms. She would be an admirable check on him."

"Jeanne moved in his own circle, and there would be no clashing of social interests."

"Jeanne was the handsomest girl in New York, and Adolphus was such an adorer of beauty."

"Jeanne was the best-dressed girl at any gathering, and Adolphus was *so* fastidious."

Plainly there could be but one possible view of this matter, and now that it was progressing so smoothly before their very eyes, the five good souls which had but one thought between them all were thoroughly well content with the way "the affair" was progressing.

In spite of his slumberous attitude Dolly was himself pondering the same subject at that moment. It made his heart throb so vigorously that he verily believed Jeanne could have seen it if she had only once let her eyes wander from the book on her lap to the front of his white merino shirt.

Impatience got the better of his nervousness presently ; of course it was an awfully presumptuous thing he was about to do. But why not put it to the test at once and win or lose it all ?

He yawned politely and purposely.

Jeanne's soft droning, that had suggested bees in a buckwheat patch to Dolly's irreverent imagination, immediately ceased. She closed the book with a snap.

"You are trying," she said, crisply. "I waste my time in daily efforts to raise you to the mental pitch of enjoying 'Lucille,' and all my reward is a succession of unblushing yawns."

"I am tired," said Dolly, humbly. "You gave me an awful tussle for that last game. Two such victories would about do me up."

"It *was* a close game," said Jeanne, glancing proudly towards the deserted tennis-court, "but I don't mean you shall have any more victories of any sort. I am a little out of practice as yet. As you are tired of my reading, shall we go to the house? But I must say you might be willing to spend one little half-hour of each day improving your mind."

"I haven't got any mind to improve. It's a sheer waste of time and goodness on your part. No, don't go to the house just yet, please. I haven't shown you that glimpse of the river which I consider so particularly fine. This way, please."

He had sprung nimbly to his feet at the first hint of her intention to go back to the house. Jeanne was willing enough to follow his guidance along the narrow pathway which soon hid them from the women on the veranda. It seemed a shame to waste such hours under a roof. Then approving smiles were bestowed impartially upon Dolly's broad back and the blue flannel basque of Jeanne's Tuxedo tennis suit, before they were ingulfed in the thick greenery that bordered the tennis-court.

"Now, then, isn't that worth the walk? And here's a seat all waiting for you."

Dolly had brought her far away from the eyes on the veranda. He knew that they were all fixed on him, and whether they could hear his words or not, it was almost like asking Jeanne to marry him in full family conclave.

Jeanne was quite as enthusiastic over the landscape he loved as his heart could desire.

Chilternhurst overlooked the Hudson. In Mr. Chiltern's day it had been one of the show places of the county, and although, since his day, under the feebler rule of his wife, it may have lost some of its smartness, nothing could ever rob it of its God-given beauties.

In long, clear stretches, far below the wooded height which Dolly had brought her to, Jeanne saw the shining river. Just below, yonder, spread the Tappan Zee, like a glittering armlet of the sea ; across, on the other side, were the wooded hills, growing blue and hazy in the distance. Below were white sails, drifting lazily hither and thither. Jeanne sat with her little hands folded in her lap, drinking it all in, in silent enjoyment.

Dolly stood leaning against the tree which helped support the bench she was sitting on.

He wished he could recall some of the many formulas he had prepared for this identical emergency. It seemed to him that he had been laboring all his life to ask Jeanne Lenox to become his wife, so far with very meagre success. He could not think of a word that did not sound like "infernal nonsense."

There was a rush and a whirr ! An express train dashed into and out of sight there below them on the track, laid close by the water's edge. Jeanne started as if from sleep.

"That spoils it all," she said, almost crossly. "I was imagining the most lovely things."

"So was I," said Dolly, with an awkward earnestness that made Jeanne push her big straw hat far back on her head, so that she could look up at him inquiringly.

"But it all must be so perfectly familiar to you. You've been seeing it this way every summer of your life."

"Not *this* way."

She dropped her eyes before something unmistakable she saw in his. Could it be possible that the foolish boy was going to spoil her nice country visit by getting sentimental? He just shouldn't. That was all there was to it.

"Not this way? Oh, I remember, Mrs. Chiltern told me she had been cutting out some fresh vistas. What is that delicious little old stone house, there, at the water's edge, with the red vines and the gray mosses running all over it?"

"Mother calls it her boat-house. I call it the tramp's summer resort. Generally half-a-dozen of them lodge there every night," says Dolly, sulkily.

"On beds?"

"No, I guess not."

"Poor things!"

"Who?" Dolly laughed nervously. He was perfectly conscious that she was making talk; but wasn't that rather a favorable sign?

"The tramps," said Jeanne, tenderly. "I do feel so sorry for them. Every man's hand against them, don't you know?"

A shrill human whistle came to them just then from somewhere in the rear of the bench Jeanne was sitting upon. She sprang up with a scream.

"What is it? Snakes?" Dolly was all concern.

"No. I thought—how do you know that wasn't one of those horrid wretches?"

"Which horrid wretches?" Dolly asked, ungrammatically.

"Tramps! Didn't you say the place teemed with them?"

"I think not. And if I did, there are eight or nine gardeners always in some part of the grounds. You are perfectly safe here in daytime, and—oh, Miss Lenox—I wish—"

Jeanne glanced around her furtively. The whistling, which had at first sounded so piercingly close at hand, was still distinctly audible, but it came to them somewhat softened now by distance. She rose and motioned him to pick up "Lucille," which had fallen under the bench.

She would see to it, she said to herself, angrily, that they were not left alone again, as long as she was here. The silly, silly boy!

She held out her hand for the book. Dolly took hand and book both, into firm but gentle possession.

"Won't you let me tell you what I wish?" he asked.

"I suppose you wish I wasn't such a coward. But I am. Papa says I am ready to go into hysterics at sight of a mouse. Florence—that's my maid—I wouldn't bring her out here because she would have spoiled my visit. She is a tyrant. I hate her. She is one of the things I am most afraid of in this world. Oh, there's no end of things that I am afraid of. I'm sorry, but our nice walk is all spoiled. And I'm dreadfully hungry, too."

Dolly listened to her in amazement. When ever before had he known her to give such loose rein to

her tongue? Then the light of a new-born intelligence dawned in his face. Perhaps he was one of the things she was afraid of. He was a brute to try to take advantage of her in this fashion. He released hand and book gently. He wished he could put all his contrition into words.

He dropped quietly into place by her side and was about to enter into a comprehensive dissertation on the habits and habitat of the genus tramp, when that disturbing whistle sounded so directly in the path behind them that he wheeled suddenly, angrily-minded to put a stop to this impertinence.

Some laurel bushes parted on one side the narrow path. A man's hat came into view, then his shoulders, and in a second more Randall Mackaye was lifting his hat to Miss Lenox, while shaking Dolly by the hand with the most effusive pleasure.

"Mrs. Chiltern was kind enough to give me permission to hunt you up. I was to tell you luncheon had been waiting an eternity."

Dolly went through the ceremony of introducing his friend to Miss Lenox.

"I have met Mr. Mackaye before—several times," said Jeanne; "in fact, we are quite old friends." And she put a fluttering little hand into Randall's.

It was calmly enough said, but Dolly wondered a little why he had not known it before—and why was Jeanne dropping her eyes and blushing so furiously?

Jeanne had taken position between the two men, and the three were moving towards the house. Dolly was conscious of a certain lack of inward cordiality in his reception of his guest, which he was generously-

minded to do away with. He leaned forward to say, across Jeanne's big hat:

"It was real good of you to come, Mackaye, busy man as you are. Mother told me she had written you herself, but I hadn't heard the result."

"No. I found Mrs. Chiltern with my note in her lap. I followed it out on an earlier train than I had named."

"That accounts for my ignorance. I would have met you at the train." The last remnant of stiffness dissolved in a sudden burst of gay laughter, that bubbled straight up from Dolly's light heart.

"Miss Lenox, may I tell him?"

"Tell him what?" Jeanne asked, looking him threateningly in the eyes.

"How he frightened you."

"You are a foolish boy, and I am going to tell your mother, your two aunts, and your two sisters on you."

Jeanne had discovered Adolphus' sore spot, and pressed it with truly feminine malice.

"How was I so unfortunate as to frighten Miss Lenox?" Randall asked, modulating his voice to a tone of personal inquiry.

He could not see her face for the big hat that shaded it, but he was looking down upon the full, white throat left bare by the low, rolling collar of her tennis-suit, and he could see its agitated swell.

Whatever that handsome boy on the other side of her had been saying to her, as they sat there overlooking his ancestral acres, Jeanne, his little Jeanne, who had given him her heart entirely unasked, was true to him so far.

Thus the egotist to himself.

"You did not frighten me at all," said Jeanne, with uncalled-for asperity. "We had been talking about tramps and things, and your whistling sounded startlingly near at first, then it died away, and then it came nearer."

"Yes," said Randall; "it took me quite a little while to find you. Your paths are really labyrinthine, Chiltern."

"Slightly sinuous. I believe, as a rule, there is a crookedness in a gardener's perceptions of the beautiful which, fortunately, is not shared by everybody."

He answered at random. He was troubled by a vague unrest. Something mystified him. Why had Jeanne's mood changed so suddenly from the most delightful appreciation of all the pleasant things about her, to an exasperating touchiness which he did not know how to meet? And what was there lacking in Mackaye's manner towards Jeanne, which he, Dolly, found so irritating? Was it a lack of reverence?

Dolly was not good at conundrums. He gave this one up presently, with a sharp mental reprimand of himself.

He was all out of kilter because his wooing of Jeanne had gone awry. Mackaye was all right. Jeanne was all right. The beam was in his own eye.

And Jeanne Lenox? Ignorant, blind Jeanne Lenox walked homeward between the two men, timidly reverencing Randall Mackaye and rejoicing over his advent; while for Adolphus Chiltern she could find nothing in her heart but a repetition of her resolve that her "visit should not be spoiled by that foolish, foolish boy."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE room that Randall Mackaye occupied on that sultry June night presented a curious contrast to the one which was then sheltering Marianne, his wife.

Randall's was a big square upper chamber, selected for him by Mrs. Chiltern and the girls, "on account of the charming views to be seen from any one of its windows." Its ceiling was lofty and its windows were generous. From heavy gilt cornices embroidered curtains of the finest muslin swayed in the night breeze.

All around him pale-blue damask upholstery invited to repose. Across the foot of his bed a white-silk eider-down quilt lay folded. There were brackets full of new books on his table, and low-hung pictures challenged his criticism or admiration at every turn.

There was no possibility of *ennui*, unless, indeed, the occupant of this goodly apartment had long been satiated with luxury, which was not the case with Randall Mackaye.

He had never yet had his proper share of this sort of thing, he thought.

He placed one of the big blue chairs in front of one of the generous windows, where he could look out upon a moon-flooded world—a quiet, noiseless, clean world, where the soft rustle of innumerable leaves, and the

sleepy twitter of a disturbed nestling close by, fell soothingly on ears fresh from the unholy rattle of the stony city.

He had some hard thinking to do that night ; some thinking on a subject of considerable importance. He had promised to evolve an entirely original plan for a lawn party, which Mrs. Chiltern and "the girls" had suddenly agreed upon at the dinner-table as "something to do."

"We want our garden tea to be something altogether unique, Mr. Mackaye," Dolly's youngest sister had said, with nervously clasped hands. "Do think up something for us. I know your artistic intuitions will suggest something no one ever dreamed of before."

And the oracle had promised to deliver itself the next morning at the breakfast-table.

His "artistic intuitions" suggested to him, as he sat there with his arms folded on the window-sill, looking for inspiration, now at the blue-black vault of the sky over him, with its far-scattered stars, now at the silvery reaches of the Hudson, seen through lapses in the thick trees, that he could evolve better if he only dared smoke a cigarette in that pure, virginal apartment ; but he did not dare.

Dolly had escorted him as far as the stables after dinner, with a laughing apology and some half-vexed protests against "a woman's prejudice multiplied by five." There, out of sight and sound of the house, they had smoked their cigars in peace, and then they had walked slowly back to the house, trusting to deliberation and the open air to secure them against detection.

In spite of this slight sacrifice to a "woman's preju-

dice," this, his first evening at Chilternhurst, had been a thoroughly enjoyable one.

Women with soft, cultured voices—daintily-garbed women, who exhaled suggestions of luxury and good-breeding—had surrounded him on the vine-clad veranda, plying him with charmingly ignorant questions touching his art, which was to them so awe-inspiring. They made him the central object of endless little attentions, and spoke sweetly of his growing fame and his brilliant future. It flattered him and soothed a certain inward smart which was ever present with him.

It all came back to him as he sat there trying to think up something absolutely original for the Chiltern garden party. But the pretty prattle of Mrs. Chiltern's girl guests, divested of their own charming personality, sounded weak and empty. With a sudden wrench memory forced him backward to the last visit he had paid to one of these luxurious country homes, and that disastrous talk with Marianne when he got home.

"It was an accursed display of bad temper on her part. I would like to stop thinking of her altogether. She has spoiled my past for me ; she shall not spoil the present, nor the future."

He sprang to his feet with such impetuosity as to send Mrs. Chiltern's blue-damask arm-chair rolling away from him on its smooth castors.

"After all"—he was disrobing for bed—"Dolly has gotten together a deucedly vapid set of women. If Marianne had a better temper, and knew how to dress herself, I wouldn't be ashamed of her among the best of them."

It was not until after his first nap, when he awoke

feeling chilly, and had drawn the silken coverlet up over him, that his mind again reverted to the garden party, which he was expected to map out, on a plan altogether novel, by breakfast-time the next morning.

By breakfast-time the next morning, not that leisurely come-when-you-please meal which was such a charming exception to Mrs. Chiltern's otherwise rather rigid code, but by the half-past seven o'clock breakfast hour which holds good among the working bees in this big human hive of ours, and which was always clamorously announced by a half-grown bell in Marianne's lodging-house, she had already made neat the small room where she had taken refuge, and was at work with her brush.

The clamorous bell had no claims to her attention. She was only a lodger—a quiet, soft-voiced lodger, who came in and went out with square packages done up in light-yellow paper, which everybody who knew anything at all about her knew to be pictures going to the paint shop, but whom nobody questioned. When or how or on what she sustained life no one but herself knew or cared. She knew as little, in her turn, about the other human beings under the same roof with her. She knew that her landlady was a fashionable dress-maker, with no end of people of her own—sisters and nephews and nieces, all in some sort of business which fully occupied them.

That was what she liked about this house. There were no boarding-house gossips to be prying into her life; no one to come and “sit awhile” in the little room under the roof, at the back of the house, to which

she climbed laboriously after every exit, and for which she paid the moderate sum of four dollars per week.

She could have wished that the one window was larger, and the outlook more inspiring. But she was not exacting of Fate. There was a good deal she would have liked to have different. Those mammoth yellow letters, in which the virtues of Castoria were permanently set forth against a rusty black surface, were trials to the flesh, from which she was only partially exempt when the huge yellow letters grew dim under the shadows of the night, but the towering brick houses still encircled and stifled her.

There was the low, flat tin roof, to which she could escape through the trap-door when life became absolutely insupportable in her stuffy little room. And the moon, which on that night gave to Randall Mackaye soft, silvery reaches of the Hudson River, and white, gleaming, rustling poplar leaves, gave to her the clustered roofs and the heavenward-pointed steeples of the sweltering city.

She was glad that no one of the landlady's big family ever cared to climb to the roof. It was her domain, and many an hour she paced from cornice to rear with nothing but the starlit heavens over her, with the roar of the city coming to her in a subdued murmur, asking herself insistently over and over again, if she had done the right thing by her husband; and always—always came back the answer evolved from a pure heart and a clear conscience: "Yes. If I stood in the way of his God-given talents I should have stepped aside and left him unhampered. A year will tell whether or not—he—needs me. He *said* I hampered him."

It was this absolute and habitual isolation from all social claims which perhaps made Marianne turn with a start of almost rude surprise at the somewhat gusty entrance of her landlady, towards dusk of the next day.

"I'm so glad to find you in, Mrs. Fawcett; you won't mind my sitting down. I'm all out of breath, and all out of temper, too. How perfectly lovely your room does look!"

Marianne smiled patiently. She did not share the good woman's enthusiasm over her retreat, but as she had been tenderly ministered to by this panting creature, in a short but acute visitation of pain, her feelings were altogether kindly.

"Can I do anything for you, Mrs. Roper?" she asked, politely, laying down the book she was reading.

"You can. I'm in a peck of trouble. Read that, will you?"

Mrs. Roper's manner was emphatic. She laid a crumpled telegram in Marianne's lap. The telegram stated peremptorily that Mrs. Roper must hold herself in readiness to prepare a costume at two days' notice, for a garden party, at which the wearer was to represent mountain laurel. She must design it *at once*, and the young lady would be in the next morning to be fitted.

The telegram was signed "Jeanne Lenox."

Marianne read it and laid it back in Mrs. Roper's lap. She was at a loss to understand the consternation it had created.

"Well!"

Mrs. Roper twisted the unoffending bit of paper viciously about in her fingers.

“As if I knew anything on earth about laurel mountain—”

“Mountain laurel,” Marianne said, putting her right, botanically.

“And my designer off on her vacation ! ”

“Then why don’t you telegraph back that you can’t do it ? ”

“Can’t do it ! Did you see the signature ? ”

“Yes. I saw it was signed Jeanne Lenox.”

“And that stands for several thousand dollars every year to me. I must do it. If she was to come here to-morrow and find I hadn’t even made a stagger at it, do you know what she would do ? ”

“I haven’t the remotest idea,” said Marianne, inwardly wondering why this perplexed soul should have selected her as a despositary of her anxieties.

“Why she would simply walk over to Greenleaf, and I should be ruined. She is a nice girl when everything goes to suit her ; but my ! she is pugnacious when it don’t. She’s spoilt, you see. Only child. Father no end of money. French maid, all claws and eyes, for trainer.”

“Poor child ! I am sorry for her. I expect——”

Mrs. Roper interrupted her savagely :

“You will be sorry for me this time to-morrow if that laurel mountain dress isn’t designed. What do I know about laurels and mountains ?—me that never slept a night out of New York City, except when I was on the other side buying goods in Paris ? *Dear Mrs. Fawcett !* ”

With the most sudden transition from white heat to beseeching humility Mrs. Roper clasped her thin, work-worn hands and looked at Marianne with a great longing in her faded eyes.

“You do paint so beautifully. Such lovely fruit and flower pieces! I declare your lemons put my teeth on edge, and I always feel like biting your water-melons.”

Marianne returned thanks politely for this unstinted praise. Mrs. Roper resumed breathlessly:

“And *you* must have seen this laurel nonsense sometime in your life. Wouldn't you, oh, wouldn't you, my dear Mrs. Fawcett? I know it is a step down, artistically speaking—but—if you only would design Miss Lenox's costume for me!”

“But the young lady might not like my design. It is sure not to be conventional.”

“Precisely! Exactly! You couldn't have said a better thing. Just design something entirely unlike anything that ever was heard of before, and Miss Lenox will go wild with delight. Oh, I will pay you anything you ask—that is—provided, of course—anything in reason.”

“I shan't ask you anything,” said Marianne, curtly. “This is not my line of work; but you have been very good to me, and if I can save a valuable customer to you I shall be glad to do it.”

“You are an angel. I always knew you were. Valuable—I should say she was. Miss Lenox is worth a clear five thousand a year to me, and I will never, never allow my designer to leave my side again, no—” most emphatically—“not unless it is to attend her own funeral.”

Mrs. Roper went downstairs with her heart lightened of an immense load, and Marianne laid aside her book to design a costume for Jeanne Lenox which should unmistakably and in every detail suggest the delicate beauty of the mountain laurel.

“That was an inspiration of yours,” said Jeanne Lenox, turning to Randall with glowing cheeks and bright eyes. “Now if Roper only has the sense to execute it properly ! Oh, we are so charmed !”

Pretty much the same thing had been said to him by Mrs. Chiltern, her two sisters, her two daughters, and five other girls. His inspiration had been the suggestion that each table set upon Mrs. Chiltern’s lawn should stand for a certain flower ; and from the gay canopy which sheltered it, down to the costuming of the guests who sat at it, the supremacy of the emblem was to be observed.

The idea was declared to be altogether perfect, and the hours of preparation flew on winged feet. Jeanne had even gone the length of securing a little private advice from the hero of the day.

“You know pink is adorably becoming to me,” she said, lifting bright, anxious eyes to his face.

“Then why not be mountain-laurel ?” he had returned, promptly.

“That is an inspiration,” Jeanne had said, rapturously, before rushing off to send her telegram to Roper.

“That is an inspiration,” Mrs. Roper said to Marianne, leaning rapturously over the table upon which her lodger was displaying the perfected design. Then she, too, sent a telegram : “Design ready. Come when you please,” after despatching which she turned solemnly to Marianne : “You have saved me !”

CHAPTER XIV.

“SHE don’t like it! Says she can’t see any sense in it. I am ruined!”

Mrs. Roper burst in upon her lodger the next morning with this desperate declaration, just as Marianne had laid down her brush and was filling a small copper tea-kettle in preparation for her noonday cup of tea.

“Don’t see any sense in it!”

As long as she had *stooped* to the designing of a costume, Marianne did not propose to have it underrated in any such fashion.

“No; says she can’t make head nor tail of it. She’s downstairs now, wringing her hands and going on—” Mrs. Roper was quite breathless from excitement and climbing. She was the picture of dishevelled despair.

“Then it is because she has no head of her own,” said Marianne, calmly proceeding to light the gas and balance the tea-kettle on its tripod.

“That is what I told her—no—not exactly—I declare I am that upset that I believe I have lost my own head. I told her if she could have it described to her by my designer (dear Mrs. Fawcett, we people in business *have* to tell lies sometimes), who was an accomplished artist—that was no lie—I was quite sure she would see that the design was both unique and lovely.”

“Why don’t you describe it to her?”

“I have, over and over again. But, you see, I can only execute. I always make Henriette do the talking, and Henriette is off on that dreadful vacation.”

Marianne, looking into the anxious face before her, and taking pitiful note of the nervous twitching in the work-worn fingers which had performed many a kindly office for her, slowly untied her painter's pinafore, and smoothing her rumpled hair down with her hands, said quietly :

“I will go down with you, Mrs. Roper. I am sure, unless the young lady is very unreasonable or entirely lacking in taste, we can make her like that design.”

But she did not go down with Mrs. Roper. Mrs. Roper flung herself out of the room with a gurgle of rapturous gratitude, and was back in Jeanne's presence long enough to say with calm dignity, “I have summoned my designer,” before Marianne, moving at her usual gait, had reached the door of the reception room.

Jeanne was sitting with her back to the door, facing a confused mass of pink tissue paper, spread out on a divan before her. Her hands were folded over the parasol that lay across her lap, and her eyes were fixed gloomily on that mystifying heap of loose patterns. She glanced up with surprise as a soft, cultured voice broke in upon her sombre reflections.

She had just been saying to herself that life could hold no greater calamity than to fail in carrying out Randall's beautiful conceptions for this garden-party. It was not at all as if it were an ordinary tea. There was poetry in this idea !

“Mrs. Roper tells me that you are not quite satisfied with the design for your costume.”

"Quite satisfied? Not at all satisfied! My dear creature, it is positively mystifying, not to say absurd. Can anybody find mountain laurel in that heap?"

Jeanne laughed recklessly and pointed her parasol at the heap as if she should like very much to punch a hole through the mass. Then she stood up, impelled to this unusual concession by the stately dignity of the woman before her.

Mrs. Roper also did an unusual thing at this juncture. She introduced her designer to her customer.

"Mrs. Fawcett—Miss Lenox. It is so much more comfortable, you know, to be able to call names."

This lucid but well-meant remark was entirely thrown away on Marianne and on Jeanne. At sound of that light, reckless laugh, Marianne had turned her eyes for the first time full upon the customer. Before then she had taken her in simply as an adjunct to the pink tissue paper on the lounge.

What a malicious trick fate had played her! There was no doubt about it. This girl and the one whom she had sent away from Randall's studio with baffled curiosity that day were one and the same! She had almost forgotten her, forgotten her in the graver issues that had come into her life so immediately after that morning's experience. She had no fear of her husband's going very far in that direction. This girl was simply an exponent of the luxuries he loved and sought.

He was exacting and selfish. This girl would be exacting too. Randall would have to minister to her. He would never minister to anyone. He was quite incapable of that patient, enduring affection which would carry him over and beyond her harmless, pretty little tyrannies to

the sweetness that, no doubt, permeated the innermost recesses of this spoilt child's soul.

All this while with her deft fingers she was manipulating the crumpled pink patterns, until there seemed to burst upon Jeanne's delighted vision the exquisite tints and outlines of the clustering laurel she meant to symbolize.

"Now do you see it?" Mrs. Roper cried, in triumph, while Marianne was still silently twisting the crumpled petals in her long white fingers.

"See it? It is divine! Oh, you angel!—you are an artist—you are——"

Her eyes travelled beyond Marianne towards the door. There was a rustle of silk! an explosion of kisses! a cataract of expletives! then Jeanne, dragging by their hands two newly-arrived customers, brought them up before the sofa with a triumphant nod of her little head:

"Look at that and tell me what you think of it!"

They thought it was "divine," "lovely," "exquisite," "just perfect"—but what was it for?

"For a garden-party at Mrs. Chiltern's. I'm out there for two weeks. Then we are going to Bar Harbor. Papa does talk a little about Europe, but that is only in case somebody does something or don't do anything about some railroad stock he is interested in. I never do get it right."

All three of these favored ones of fortune, however, found Jeanne's costume more interesting than the vague possibility of somebody's doing or not doing something to Mr. Lenox's stock.

"But what is to be the material?"

"What? Mrs. Fawcett, I hadn't asked yet.

"Pink *crêpe*. It has the desired crimp," said Marianne, slowly turning the model about before laying it down.

She had done her duty and vindicated her design. She was ready to return now, but an imploring look from Mrs. Roper, sent across Jeanne's shoulders, kept her standing with the model still in her hand. They were all standing, Jeanne, the picture of content now, occasionally executing little sighs of relief as she patted or picked at the tissue paper.

"You must have something unique on hand out there as well as here. You know we were invited, but being in mourning—"

"Yes, I know," said Jeanne, assuming a fleeting expression of acute sympathy. "Your poor dear uncle—but he was so old—must have been a relief. Yes, indeed—we have something unique. Think of a garden tea, where each table represents a certain flower. There are to be big canopies over each table showing just what flower it represents. Poppies, sunflowers, mountain laurel, and—and—"

"I suppose you can outrage nature with perfect impunity—make spring and summer and autumn flowers all bloom at once, if you choose?"

"Yes, I suppose so"—Jeanne was dubious on the score of nature, but quite positive in the realm of dry-goods.

"Who is the originator of this unique idea?"

"This?"—pointing to the model.

"No, Mrs. Chiltern's garden-party."

“Oh, a gentleman who is there on a visit. You have heard of him. Mr. Randall Mackaye.”

The pink paper model of Miss Lenox's costume fell, with a soft rustle, from the designer's hand, upon the divan. The designer turned her back upon the group and busied her trembling fingers with the frail garment.

“Mackaye, the sculptor?”

“Yes, of course you know him. He goes everywhere.”

“I have met him. The men say he could do great things if he chose to buckle down to work. He has it in him. The talent, I mean—not the work.”

“He is going to do great things,” said Jeanne, with a metallic ring in her voice, that sounded queer to one pair of ears within hearing of it. “Papa says he has an unfinished statue in his studio which will place him in the front ranks of American artists when it is finished.”

“*If* it is finished, you had as well say. That means, if you women don't turn his head so completely as to spoil him for work. He is a handsome fellow and an entertaining one; we all admit that. Well, Mrs. Roper, is there any chance for us alongside of Jeanne and her mountain laurel?”

Marianne laid the model carefully down. She had stood there as long as she would or could. But she was glad she had heard this childish prattle. She mounted the steps to her room with a fast-beating heart.

Yes, she repeated, with a sort of fierce denial of an inward protest—*glad!* Was it not in order that he should have perfect freedom to live the life best suited to the development of his art tendencies that she had

effaced herself? And should she complain now, if she heard of him as luxuriating in the soft places, surrounded by the people and the things best calculated to nourish his voluptuous nature? And yet, there was a fierce protest coming uppermost—it would be heard. She crushed in her hands the rough draughts of the model she had left downstairs and flung them into the grate.

“Was it for *that* sort of thing she had left him unhampered; was *that* the best use he could make of his luxurious freedom?—his great talents?”

To her, reared in an atmosphere of reverence for art, it had seemed almost a crime to stand in the way of its fullest development in her husband. He had said, in that bitter interview, every word of which was burned into her memory, that he “must make his flights on clipped wings,” and she had felt like the worst of culprits, for had not she clipped his wings when she married him?

He had been very dear to her, this splendid egotist. She had been hovering over him, caring for him, ministering to his comfort through all the years of his early tutelage to her father, when he had formed one of their little family circle. To some natures—strong, sweet, pure natures—the element of care-taking serves to intensify affection. It was so with Marianne. If she had been a mother she would have obliterated herself entirely for her children; unwisely, but thoroughly. The necessity of sacrifice is a condition of existence with such natures.

If this experiment of hers should result in Randall's final instalment in that niche which was surely waiting for him in the temple of Fame, she would be justified.

If, on the other hand, it taught him how necessary she was to him, she would still be justified. So either way it was well.

“I must give his clipped wings time to grow,” she said, turning back to her own work with a wan smile on her lips, but resolution in her heart.

The sudden break in the formality of her relations with Mrs. Roper, as lodger and landlady threatened to have consequences.

When the full flower of her designing was ready for exhibition Mrs. Roper appeared again within Marianne’s door. The small room could scarcely accommodate the big pasteboard box in which Jeanne’s costume was about to be expressed to Chilternhurst.

“I thought you would like to see it before it left the house,” said Mrs. Roper, kneeling before the big pasteboard box and lifting the costume with reverent hands for Marianne’s inspection.

“You could make your fortune as a designer,” she said, enthusiastically, kneeling again to replace the gauzy garment with precision. “I wish you would think of it.”

“I think my own work suits me best,” said Marianne ; then quickly, for fear she had seemed to look down upon Mrs. Roper’s line of art, “I am afraid of fashionable young ladies.”

Mrs. Roper rose from her knees, twisting a small bit of twine, left over from tying the box, between her fingers.

“I am sorely tempted to tell you something,” she said, looking reflectively into Marianne’s face. “You

don't seem to know anybody, and I do believe you are discreet."

Marianne's heart was beating furiously, but she looked calmly in Mrs. Roper's face as that lady resumed:

"It just goes to show what an all-sorts of a world this is. After Miss Lenox went away, which she did about five minutes after you left the room, those other two got to talking about her, as women will, you know, behind each other's backs. The best of them will."

"Well?"

"And Mrs. Becks said (of course I wouldn't talk this way to anybody but you, Mrs. Fawcett) that Miss Lenox was just making a fool of herself about Randall Mackaye, and he didn't care anything more for her than he did for—I don't know what her comparison was. But—I'm not so sure about that."

"Well, what have you or I to do with it?" Marianne asked, in a voice she had never seemed to hear before.

"Not much. But—well—Ran is my brother, that is all. Not that I would ever bother him, even if he was to become Jerome Lenox's son-in-law to-morrow."

"Randall Mackaye your brother?"

"My brother. Is that so hard to believe? He is a good deal younger than I am. I wasn't married when father died. Mother died when Ran was a handsome little chap in kilt skirts. I always took care of him. Mother made me promise I would look out for him always. Then, when father died—as I was engaged to be married to Mr. Roper, who was in a good business, and able to look out for me—I gave Ran the three hundred dollars that was all we had left after father's funeral, and told him it was to give him a start in life. He took

it—the start, I mean—and it wasn't long before he walked clean out of my life. I think he sort of looked down on Mr. Roper because he was a merchant tailor, you know. Ran always was a high-flyer, but as long as he needed me I was willing to overlook his nonsense. If he needed me this minute I'd go to him. That I would."

Marianne looked at her with shining eyes. What a queer bond of sympathy had suddenly been established between her and this plain, elderly working-woman, the widow of a merchant tailor and the sister of her husband!

"And you have known nothing of your brother's life since he left you?"

"Precious little! You know it's easy enough to lose sight of a body right here in this town. We heard he was working under an old portrait-painter somewhere in Newark, Brooklyn, or Hoboken. Then I did hear that he was married, but I know that ain't so, for some time back I was hurrying through Washington Square, late, getting back from carrying a dress home myself (an awful fractious customer at the New York Hotel: I always put her dresses on and fasten them up myself), and I saw him sitting on a bench, dressed in full evening dress, smoking a cigar; and there was a big bouquet of roses on the bench by him. I knew him the minute I laid eyes on him."

"How does all that prove him unmarried?"

"Oh, well, he didn't look married, you know. Besides, this talk downstairs shows I'm right. If he is flying around Miss Lenox he can't have a wife anywhere. Ran isn't *that* sort of a scamp. He's selfish.

He was born selfish, and I think maybe I helped to make him more so—always putting myself out of the way for him, you know ; but Ran is a gentleman. He never would play a mean trick on a woman—never ! ”

She was gathering up her things for descent. Marianne had listened in unbroken silence towards the last. Mrs. Roper’s politeness suggested an apology :

“ I don’t know what I’ve bored you with this bit of family history for, but it is a comfort to open your heart to a woman. Don’t you think so ? And I know you are discreet. If Randall can climb to the very top-most rung of the ladder, he can climb without any fear of me putting a block in his way ; only ”—and Mrs. Roper laughed a short, withered sort of laugh—“ it did strike me as comical to hear of him as a beau of Miss Lenox’s.”

“ Then you think—perhaps—that your brother really is an admirer of Miss Lenox’s ? ”

How queer that she should be able to ask such a question unfalteringly !

“ Admirer ? Yes : we all admire her ; who can help it ? But in love with her—no. If Ran ever does come to love any woman it will have to be a growth with him. He will have to get out of and beyond himself by very slow degrees before he can yield his heart absolutely and entirely. And when he does, the surrender will not be made to a—Jeanne Lenox.”

“ To what sort of woman then ? ”

“ To a woman stronger, better, and truer than any I have ever had the honor of fitting yet.”

And without the remotest idea that she had been administering comfort in large measure, Mrs. Roper took

herself downstairs once more, quite satisfied that her involuntary betrayal of a bit of family history had fallen on bored and unheeding, but discreet ears.

“She is right—it will be the growth of a passion,” said Marianne, lifting her head from her folded arms, after the lapse of an intense half-hour.

CHAPTER XV.

IF one could possibly imagine the sensations of a brilliant butterfly which, by some freak of nature, had been forced to resume the dingy conditions of its existence as a grub, one might adequately measure the deep disgust which took entire possession of Randall Mackaye when he found himself once more installed in his studio, his visit to Chilternhurst at an end, "with no chance of another escape soon."

He had gotten back from Chilternhurst late one afternoon, and opened his studio door with that vague sense of anticipation that never forsook him now. He never left his rooms without that feeling of expectation. When he came back he should find everything straightened up, a glass of flowers in the window (Marianne always would have flowers about), and Marianne herself sitting at her easel or her sewing machine.

He was generally prepared with a formula for the occasion. He would greet her as if she had just been off on a visit, and make no allusion to her "tantrums." Of course, in that case, his dream of taking a position in metropolitan circles as Jerome Lenox's son-in-law would have to be foregone, but—in case Marianne should obstinately refuse to acknowledge the error of her ways and should refuse to return to him, why—well—he did not propose to lament the failure of his married life for

always. Nor would he be in an excessive hurry to put his neck once more within the yoke. He meant to enjoy the good things of life which fate was offering tardily.

But Marianne was not there when he got back from Mrs. Chiltern's. There were flowers in the window, but it was only a mass of discolored roses, with a dark-brown liquid in the glass where once had been water. They were Mrs. Chiltern's roses. A mouse scampered hastily out of sight as he opened the door. It had been living luxuriously for a whole week on the remnants of his last lunch. The room had a close and musty smell. He had closed the windows in leaving, for in case of rain no one would have taken enough interest in his things to have looked after his windows.

He flung the windows wide open now, scratched a match, and lit the gas jet immediately behind the statue. It was the one nearest at hand. He searched the letter-box, just inside the door, next. There was nothing there but a few tradesmen's circulars. His correspondence was not large.

No more invitations to nice country houses ! no word from Marianne ! It must be that "infernal statue" that forced her so prominently into his mind as soon as he got back, he told himself angrily. He didn't believe it would be possible for him to spend this first evening alone in his studio. The contrast was too sharp. Here, dust, poverty, silence ; at Chilternhurst, light, air, luxury.

He turned the gas jet behind the statue out with a quick movement. The thing was casting ghostly

shadows across the studio. He lighted the lamp on the table and opened the evening paper to see what was going on.

Nothing, of course ! Nothing ever did go on in the middle of July. Every decent body had put miles of land or water between them and this broiling oven, in which he was destined to swelter alone for several months to come.

Plainly the outlook before him was not enticing. His acquaintance among the owners of nice country houses was limited as yet. He was entirely indebted to Dolly Chiltern for the "jolly week" which had grown into two jolly weeks before the Chilternhurst crowd had scattered.

The Lenoxes had gone to Bar Harbor. There was a strong probability that they might go to Europe sometime in August. Dolly Chiltern had followed them to Bar Harbor.

"He may follow her to the end of the world if he sees fit. Dolly is not dangerous. He might be, now, if she were poor."

A disagreeably complacent look passed over Randall's handsome face just at that stage of his reverie. He was threading his silky side-whiskers with long muscular fingers, and holding the fine hairs out to their utmost length, as he criticised himself complacently in the mirror opposite.

Dolly's own absence from town was an added grievance. His devotion to Mackaye, and his insatiable craving for citizenship in Bohemia, had resulted in many an expensive treat, which Randall could not hope

to enjoy again until Dolly was once more installed in his town quarters.

"I shall have to take my choice between work and suicide. Which shall it be?" he asked aloud, looking bored and wretched.

He laughed recklessly, and shoved the evening paper from him with childish petulance. It had failed to suggest any relief from boredom, and he had no further use for it. He plunged his face into his outstretched hands and sat motionless.

The studio door opened noiselessly behind him, and Marianne's father stepped into the ring of light cast by the shaded lamp. He glanced with surprise at the figure by the table, then came forward eagerly.

"Why, Ran! You here? I've been making trips across the river 'most every day this week to see you. This time I was going to leave a note for you."

Randall had lifted his head at the sound of the old man's voice. He would have welcomed the society of his worst enemy at that juncture.

"I've just got home," he said, shoving a chair towards his father-in-law, "and was feeling deucedly bored with myself already. Glad to see you."

"Got home from where, Ran?"

"From Chilternhurst."

"Chilternhurst? Where is that? I don't seem to be able to place it on the map."

"It isn't on any map. It is the name of Mrs. Chiltern's country place on the Hudson, up about Tarrytown. I've been there on a visit."

"Oh! I thought, maybe, it was some place where

Nan-nan might have wandered to, and you had gone up to coax her back home."

"I shall never do that. Never, so help me——"
Randall looked at the gentle face of the old man opposite to him, seamed and furrowed with new lines of care, it appeared to him, and the hand upheld to emphasize his oath fell nerveless upon the table between them.

"She left me of her own free will, Mr. Grayson."

"I know it ; I know it. She told me so herself."

"Then she did go to you ?"

"I found her there when I went back from here. She staid that night with me."

"Where is she now ?"

"I do not know."

Randall searched his face carefully.

"I do not know, Randall. I think I was a little hard on Nan-nan that night. I scolded her. I thought, you know, she would expect me to see only her side."

"And didn't she ?"

"This don't look much like it. She left this behind her, and I was going to leave it here for you. I thought, maybe, if you were still thinking hard thoughts of your wife, this would crush them all out. It ought to, Randall."

He was tearing open a sealed envelope he had held in his hand all this time. His fingers trembled over the simple task, and his breathing was audible.

"This is what Nan-nan left behind her, Randall."

He laid the unfolded slip of paper on the table before the sculptor, and leaned back in his chair with a heavy sigh. Randall read the short note almost at a glance.

He caught his breath quickly, and, shading his face with his hand, read it once again more slowly :

“Don’t worry about me, father. I shall do very well. Don’t change towards Randall. It was all my fault. You shall hear from me if I am ill.

“MARIANNE.”

He removed his hand presently to ask : “And you have heard from her?”

“Heard from her? No. I thought, Ran, especially as I came again and again and found you gone, that you would have some news of her for me.”

“Then she is not ill”—he was not answering the old man, he was pursuing the tenour of his own thoughts—“or you would have heard. She always kept her promises.”

“Yes. Nan-nan always kept her promises.”

“This note is generous. May I— I suppose you prefer keeping it, though?”

The old man held out his hand. “Yes, I want it back, Ran. It may be, you know, that I shall never hear from her again.”

“Nonsense!—rubbish! You are talking twaddle, Mr. Grayson ; the veriest sickly stuff.”

“I am an old man, Randall ; a very old man.”

“She should have staid with you. She need not have deserted us both. I should not have forced her to return to me.”

“I will tell you what she said about that, Ran : ‘I do not want it to be in any one’s power, father, to say that you are harboring a truant wife.’ And more than

once, that evening, she said she thought I might be of great use to you, Randall, and she did not want to stand between us. She knew, you know, that I had predicted great things of you."

"That was unselfish of her," Randall said, absently.

"I never knew Nan-nan do a selfish thing. I was hard on her that night, Ran. I was very angry with her. And—and—I refused to kiss her good-night. I wish I had that night to go over again, Ran."

Randall was sitting with his eyes still glued to the piece of paper on which Marianne had scrawled her farewell to her father :

"It was all my fault." "Don't change towards Randall."

Those words seemed branding themselves with hot irons on his inner consciousness. They burned him, pained him, made him writhe ! But what could he do about it ? Even if he had wanted to bring her back to his side—and he was not at all clear yet in his own mind on that point—what steps could he take ? He turned upon the old portrait-painter with an impatience born of his baffled efforts to see some road out of "this muddle."

"But what can I do ? She has entirely effaced herself."

"Have you tried to do anything, Randall ?"

"I have advertised."

He hung his head, so that the porcelain shade of the lamp should shield him fully from the patient, anxious eyes staring at him across the table. He was ashamed to tell the old man how he had advertised ; how, in terms sure to repel a proud woman like Marianne, he

had summoned her to return or—to take the consequences. A troubled silence fell between the two men. Then, with a slow, shuffling movement, the old one stood up and held out his withered hand to the young one.

“I suppose there is nothing you can do, Ran—I suppose there is nothing I can do—but wait. And maybe I won’t be left here long enough to see her come back to you, loving and repentant. I am an old man, Randall, a very old one, and for the last twenty-four years I’ve had nothing better to do than watch Nan-nan’s heart and soul unfolding like beautiful white flowers. If she’s done you a wrong, Randall,—and see, she’s put it down that way, in her own writing,—she will come back and say so some day. Perhaps I won’t be here to hear it, but she will do it, Ran. Nan-nan is just—and she is unselfish.” He held out his hand for the note, which Randall unwillingly relinquished to him. “Perhaps”—he was carefully folding it, to fit the dimensions of his pocket-book—“I may not be here when she comes back—”

“You will be over in Hoboken.”

“No, not there, either, Ran; I am an old man, you know; but if I’m not here, Ran, tell her that I missed her and—that I am sorry I did not kiss her good-night, that night she wanted me to. She asked me twice, but I refused her. You see, Ran, I didn’t want to seem to be siding with her against you.”

“I see.” They were walking together towards the elevator; Randall had put his strong young arm under the old man’s feeble shoulder. “I see,” he said again, in a voice from which all the impatience and irritation had suddenly been extinguished. “I wish I could make

it easier on you, Mr. Grayson. It is hard lines that I can't, when you've been doing me good turns ever since I was a beggarly little dauber."

"Don't you miss her too, Ran? Don't you too feel as if something had gone out of the world since Nan-nan took this wild whim in her head?"

The open elevator was waiting for him. There were three impatient passengers standing on its platform. Randall propelled the old man forward, the door slid between them, and that last pathetic question remained unanswered.

When he got back to the studio once more he was conscious of such an inward tempest as had rarely ever beset him. Why could he not openly and defiantly tell that trembling old man that his marriage and Marianne's had been a dismal failure, that the step she had taken towards retrieval was a wise one, and that he would not have her retrace it? Why could he not rid himself of those haunting words in which she had shielded him to the very last from the blame that was rightfully his? Yes, he would acknowledge it there, all by himself—rightfully his. Why would she perpetually force him to put her lofty integrity, her pure womanly unselfishness, against his own littleness, meanness, falseness? Later on, hours it seemed to him, he found himself standing in a sort of trance before his masterpiece. He had flung the dusty shroud to a distant corner. He was gazing steadfastly at the work of his own hands. He leaned forward once or twice to brush off a speck of loose marble dust. But he was not thinking just then of the smooth, marble arms, the proudly poised head, the delicately chiselled nostrils, or the folds of drapery that were still to be

carved out of the shapeless mass of marble in which the statue terminated.

He was thinking of Marianne, as she had looked on the day when he told her he was going to begin this, his masterpiece, taking her for his model. She had flushed up to her smooth white temples with pleasure and pride. He was thinking of her, as she had confronted him on that morning—*that morning*, after he had come back from Foster's, and had asked him to take back that ugly word "hampered." He went farther back than that, back to their life together, with the old portrait-painter in Hoboken; back to the beginning of their joint life as man and wife, when Marianne had purposely made light of every hardship and had made sunshine for him in the dark places.

Perhaps he had been a brute! The old man was right; she was just, she was unselfish.

He turned away from the statue with a petulant movement, and stooping, picked up the cloth and wrapped it once more around the smooth marble limbs.

"If it could but open its lips and tell me where you sleep to-night, I believe—yes, I believe I would go to you—Nan-nan! Oh, what an incomprehensible fool I am! I wish some one would help me to understand myself!"

The window was open. The warm air outside stirred the fringe of the yellow holland shades. Gay sounds of children's voices floated in to him from the square below. Dusk deepened into night. Lamps sprang into luminous existence here, there, everywhere.

He had forgotten that he was tired and hungry; forgotten Chilternhurst, forgotten Jeanne Lenox: for the time being Marianne, his wife, once more held full sway over that untrustworthy thing he called his heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

DR. JOHN MILBANK in winter and Dr. John Milbank in summer were two entirely different individuals, barring a few physical and moral characteristics which marked him at all times.

The urban Dr. Milbank was a faultlessly arrayed, clean-shaven, grave-eyed, methodical man of established reputation, who had office hours, which filled his handsome waiting-room to its full capacity, and who went to see his patients, out of office hours, in a smart little coupé, with a bebuttoned driver on the box.

The rural Dr. Milbank was a long-legged, light-hearted boy, with an invincible scorn for dress coats, polished shoes, and stiff hats; who luxuriated in fair-leather shoes and white flannel shirts, and climbed mountains, rowed skiffs, or fished for mythical black-fish in the most unlikely waters with infinite patience and gusto.

This Dr. Milbank, urban or rural (always urbane), had a theory which he put into practice religiously every August that rolled around. His theory was, that a man's brain, to be kept in good working order, must be entirely relieved of all tension periodically, as one lets down fiddle-strings—presumably to keep them from snapping.

The relief his brain needed was to get away from people. Eleven months out of the twelve he was giving

his brain, his energy, his sympathy, to people—people with real ills and people with fanciful ills.

The twelfth was his. In it he would do no manner of work. That was easy enough to say and to do, all the easier for the fact that Dr. Milbank's practice was largely confined to the class which would sooner be caught picking a lock than remain in town during the heated term.

(About what he did among the poor and suffering he never let his right hand gossip with his left.)

But how to get away from *people*! That was the problem that had marred his one month out of the twelve for years, until chance sent to him one day a quaint-looking little old woman, bent of back and care-worn of face, but patient and gentle—unspeakably gentle—with it all. She came to him to be healed.

She offered this successful city doctor her modest fee for the skill which had relieved her of years of suffering, with a timid suggestion by way of supplement.

“This is precious poor pay, Doctor,” she said, laying her offering on the table and eying it askance, “and I wish I could make it up to you in some other way. I could in one; but you're not likely to fancy that way, unless you get about as tired of folks and noise as I would if I lived here.”

“I do get very tired of them,” had said the city doctor, looking a trifle impatiently at this plain country-woman, who seemed inclined to consume more of his precious time than she was entitled to.

“Then perhaps what I was going to propose won't strike you as so foolish after all. I'd like to have you board it out with me in summer. I haven't paid you

enough, but I've paid you all I can in hard cash. I live in a little house up on Lake George, Doctor, not anywhere near about the big hotels. It ain't much of a house—just a little brown frame thing, set down in the middle of an apple orchard, with honeysuckle vines 'most hiding it from the road. There ain't anybody there but just me and the old man. He spends all his play-time hunting birds' eggs or stuffing birds. Childish sort of work, I tell him, but it don't make any noise and it pleases him. It's awful quiet and solemn there of nights. Then the hills grow dark and still behind us, and the lake goes swish-swashing against the rocks in front. But I think you'd like it for a little while, doctor. It's real pretty when the buckwheat is in flower and the sumach's turning red. You'd like it, maybe, if you're fond of milk and honey. We ain't very high feeders. But maybe"—she looked at him anxiously—"you wouldn't like it, it's so still. Sometimes, 'long of the middle of the day, you can hear the apples dropping in the orchard and the bees buzzing 'mong the buckwheat."

This sounded tempting to Dr. Milbank's urban ears. He thought he should like it very much, that little brown house where the honeysuckles grew and where the bees sucked the buckwheat. He said as much to Mrs. Lockhart, causing her to press her brown woollen gloves together with a gesture of mute gratitude, while her faded cheek flushed with pleasure.

"And I will try you next summer, on one condition, Mrs. Lockhart." He looked very resolute.

"Yes, sir?"

“You are not to take any other summer boarders.”

Mrs. Lockhart's laugh was one of relief.

“That'll be a easy condition to keep, Doctor. We're too far out of the way to suit most folks. But we're easy to get at, for all that. Take a skiff at Caldwell, and tell any of those fellows to row you over to old man Lockhart's, and they'll bring you smack-bang in front of our place.”

That “next summer” had come five years before, and never since had Dr. Milbank spent a single anxious speculation as to where he should spend his one month out of the twelve.

The brown cottage, with the eternal hills hovering over it; with its buckwheat fields spreading up the slopes like bleaching linen; with its orchards and its bee-hives; with its tidy house-wife, who made such marvellous hot biscuit and rich black coffee; with its sturdy old house-band, who stuffed birds or discoursed political economy with impartial readiness, had all been pleasant realities to him for half a decade.

Nothing to mar it. Nothing—until, coming home one afternoon, hungry as a bear, but especially elated with his day's success as a fisherman, Mrs. Lockhart confronted him, as he turned from securing his skiff to its post, with a face full of concern, and a voice with a nervous tremor in it.

“I hope you won't think I've gone and broken my promise to you, Dr. Milbank, for nothing was ever further from my thoughts than having Nannie Grayson drop down on me in this way. I haven't heard a word from her for more than three years now; but then, you see, she don't come under the head of summer boarder.

I wouldn't think of charging Nannie anything, and our own dear mothers own dear sisters. She's very quiet, Doctor, and perhaps after a while you might get used to seeing her about, like you did Roger—you know you couldn't abide Roger the first summer. Poor old Roger! the mice are about taking the house since he died. Such a mouser ain't picked up every day. Nannie's quite a lady."

Dr. Milbank looked down at the agitated face of his landlady in some perplexity. He had been scooping up the fish from the bottom of the boat when she had burst upon him with what sounded, in spite of its incoherence, like an abject apology. They were walking towards the house now, he carrying the bucket and she nervously twisting her apron-strings between her fingers as she glanced up at him sideways.

"I don't think I quite understand you, Mrs. Lockhart."

"It's nothing, only that I've got a very unexpected cousin here from New York. She looks bad, and says she found she had to leave town if she didn't want to get down sick, and as I had told her to come to me whenever she wanted a whiff of country air, she thought she'd come—but that was long ago, doctor, when me and the old man used to think the summer days would be shorter if somebody from the world would come and stay a bit with us two lonely old folks. We haven't wanted anybody since we found you, Doctor."

"Thank you," said Dr. Milbank; but, as Mrs. Lockhart confidentially informed Mr. Lockhart later, "he looked put out."

He was "put out." He felt defrauded. His profes-

sional sympathies were being called unduly into action by this cousin of Mrs. Lockhart's, who had come there to keep from being "taken down sick." A cousin—and a female cousin from New York! What could be more threatening? She had come there to spoil his whole month, and here he was just in the first blissful week of it. He frowned ominously. Mrs. Lockhart watched his growing seriousness with a pang at her gentle heart.

"You know I promised you, Doctor, that as long as you chose to come here you shouldn't be pestered with any other boarders, and if Nannie had written to me about her coming I could have staved her off, you know. And I can say with my head up, that neither me nor the old man ever broke a promise. A promise is a promise."

"Will you want my room?" he asked, curtly.

Mrs. Lockhart's reproachful glance was entirely thrown away on him. His eyes were fixed moodily on the dusty toes of his fair-leather shoes. He was vaguely conscious that he was acting like a bear; but his paradise had been rudely invaded and he felt bearish.

"How can you ask that, Doctor? No, sir, you're first in this house and always will be, next to the old man."

"Does she play on the piano?"

With an inward quaking he recalled the presence of a piano in Mrs. Lockhart's parlor. He had often wondered but never asked why it was there. The old man found it a convenient work-table when finishing any particularly delicate operation in taxidermy. So far it had been entirely innocuous.

"She can play, but she won't in this house," Mrs. Lockhart said, with vicious resolution in her mild voice.

"Shall I have to take her rowing every time I get into the skiff, or teach her how to handle the oars, or help her up all the steep hills, or strip birch bark for her, or do any of the other things which men who are supposed to be resting from a year's hard work are usually expected to do for idle women?"

Blood is thicker than water, and Mrs. Lockhart flared up gently. There was a pink spot on each of her thin cheeks.

"I never heard of our Nannie's making a nuisance of herself to anybody, Dr. Milbank, but a promise is a promise, and I told you you shouldn't be bothered by our taking anybody else in the house as long as you was here. Nannie's that sweet and reasonable that I can explain matters without her going off in a huff, and I'll do it the first thing in the morning, after she's rested. If you'll give me them fish, Doctor, I'll get them ready for your supper." She held out her hand for the bucket. "I'll explain matters to Nannie to-morrow."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind."

Dr. Milbank passed into the house feeling distinctly that he was neither "sweet" nor reasonable," and that he was in "a huff." But he was willing to leave it to any impartial judge, was it likely that any female cousin of Mrs. Lockhart's could come from New York and be domiciled under that cramped little roof with him, and *not* spoil his vacation? A "saleslady" doubtless—or—horrors!—perhaps a student from the woman's medical college, who would expect him to coach her for her next examination, without mercy and without a fee.

Dr. Milbank had the average male doctor's antipathy for the female of that persuasion. His imagination took wild flight between the moment when Mrs. Lockhart had broken this disagreeable piece of news to him and the one when the old taxidermist was heard spluttering in the tin wash-hand basin that stood on the corner shelf just outside his door.

That meant that supper was almost ready. He could sniff the odor of the fish frying—the fish which he had caught up the lake about three miles, in a quiet little cave, where the deflowered lily pads lay thick, and a quaint old wooden bridge had cast shadowy arches across the bit of dark water where he had fished. It was a pretty bit of nature.

He should carefully abstain from any allusions to it, however, for it would be as much as a week's peace of mind was worth to allude to any such "finds" before this new woman from New York.

If he found her too much of a bore he would leave, that was all. And no one could blame him.

Mr. Lockhart's spluttering in the basin outside suggested his own preparations for the supper table. This usually consisted in substituting his slippers for his dusty shoes, and in partially concealing his white flannel shirt under a loose sack coat of fine seersucker, Mr. and Mrs. Lockhart, in the goodness of their unsophisticated souls, protesting against even that modest display of "city style."

To-night his preparations were neither more nor less than what they always were. He was buttoning the top button of his seersucker sack, when his attention was arrested by hearing Mrs. Lockhart (evidently in

the kitchen) ask a question of her guest (evidently in the dining-room). The space of two rooms was between the voices.

“And you say your pa still holds his own, Nannie?”

“Father looks splendid. His health is marvellous, taking his age and everything else into consideration.”

The voice was a cultured one, silvery clear, and raised a little now, to be heard at a little distance and above the sounds of fish being fried and a table being set. Evidently the owner of the voice was officiating in the dining-room and Mrs. Lockhart in the kitchen. The voice itself belonged neither to a saleslady nor to a medical student. He could never imagine it calling “Cash!” with a nasal intonation, nor answering the brutally direct questions of a medical quiz. Mrs. Lockhart spoke again :

“And he still holds out at the old place?”

“Yes. Father says no place but Hoboken will ever feel like home to him, and I don’t believe it ever will.”

Hoboken !

Dr. Milbank heard no more of the conversation going on between the two women on the other side of the partition. He was once more on a ferry-boat on the North River. A white mist was over all the earth. The time was very early morning. He had been returning from an all-night case. There was only one woman passenger, and he had watched her with a sort of professional curiosity, mixed with some anxiety. She had looked ready for almost anything as she stood by herself on the front deck, her garments fluttering a little as the boat plunged its way across the river.

More than once his thoughts had gone back to the

fleeting experience of that morning ; and whenever they did he had half expressed a wish that he could have followed that experience to some sort of a finale.

“That was no ordinary woman,” he said to himself, turning towards the door, as Mrs. Lockhart, in primitive fashion, applied her mouth to its key-hole, hissing cheerfully :

“ Doctor ! Supper ! ”

Mrs. Lockhart's supper-time was primitive, as all her ideas and regulations were. It was to be gotten over and done with before “ candle-light.” Nothing pleased John Milbank better than to sit there between the two old gentlefolk, the open door, where the honeysuckle grew thickest, in front of him, and, for a background, the dark, wooded hills, which he was never tired of exploring.

To-night there was a chair opposite him at table, and between him and the honeysuckles stood a tall woman, her hand resting lightly on the back of her chair, and her sloping shoulders, surmounted by a beautiful neck and head, clearly silhouetted against the dark-green background of the hills outside.

They always stood while the old taxidermist asked God to bless the food before them. This ceremony over, Mrs. Lockhart waved her thin hand by way of indicating her cousin's presence.

“ My cousin—Miss Grayson—Dr. Milbank.”

Marianne looked her *vis-à-vis* in the face, seeing before her a tall, grand-looking man, and bowed.

She was thinking uneasily of the introduction just made in good faith by Mrs. Lockhart. Here she had expected to be nothing but “ Nannie.” These far-away

cousins knew nothing of her brief married life, and she had felt too utterly wearied, body and soul, to enlighten them. After all, what mattered it? This man would go away in a little while, and would forget her very existence, as she would his.

Dr. Milbank looked his *vis-à-vis* in the face, and almost forgot to bow at all.

The Hoboken passenger, by all that was remarkable! He had said that if ever he saw that face again he should remember it instantly. And here she was!

He sat down with a suddenness not at all in keeping with his usual elegant deliberation.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. LOCKHART sat in the doorway of the little brown cottage on the hill-side, shelling beans into her blue check apron with an expertness born of much practise. The beans were to be hung up in little canvas bags against the rafters of the shed room for winter use. Though her eyes rested upon the beans in her lap, her thoughts went in an entirely different direction, and a little, amused smile flickered about her dry lips.

Mr. Lockhart was not very far off. She could see him pottering about, examining the apples in the orchard. He was standing under "Lady Jane Grey," their very best. He was waiting for the hired man to come back from the field with another load of hay, which he would help him to pitch into the loft over the cow-shed. He had already made the cow-shed snug and tight for winter.

Already signs of the dying summer were plentiful, and Autumn was placing her flaming torches all up and down the hill-sides. The old man straightened his back and called across to the old woman sitting in the doorway shelling beans. He had two large red apples in his hands.

"I say, mother!"

There had been a child born unto the house of Lockhart many, many years ago; but it had only abode with them long enough for the old man to fall into the way of saying "mother" instead of "Mirandy."

"Well, old man?"

"I guess I'll be filling the doctor's barrel of Lady Janes and be getting his maple sugar weighed."

"I guess I wouldn't be in any particular hurry, Lockhart."

The amused smile broadened on Mrs. Lockhart's features.

"I guess I ain't in a hurry," came back to her, crisply. "He most generally leaves on the first of September, as punctual as clock-work, and here it is to-morrow the third."

"I know it. I've got a calendar hanging straight before my eyes over the kitchen table. All the same, Davie, I'd wait till the doctor ordered them apples packed."

Mrs. Lockhart's entire manner of delivering this practical advice was so much out of the ordinary that Mr. Lockhart, still holding fast his two big red apples, came slowly across the strip of yard that separated them, and, flinging the apples into her lap, sat down on the steps at her feet :

"What's the matter, Mirandy ?"

"Nothing as I know of, Davie."

"But what makes you so mysterious ?"

"Mysterious about what, Davie ?"

"Why—well—I can't just exactly say ; only something seems to be amusing you mightily."

Upon this Mrs. Lockhart permitted the smile to take full possession of her discreet old face. It curved her thin lips, wrinkled her withered cheeks, and danced merrily in her keen blue eyes.

"It is funny, Davie, and I couldn't help thinking, sitting here shelling beans, of how meek I said to him,

that maybe he would get used to her like he got used to Roger. You know he couldn't abide Roger that first summer, Lockhart."

"Yes—no. You ought to have let me stuff Roger, mother. I believe he would have kept the mice away, dead or alive. He *was* a cat."

"I'm not talking about Roger 'specially, just now, though I'll tell you now, as I told you then, if you think I would have a cat that had been following me up and down ever since it was weaned, just like a dog, stuffed and plumped down in one place to be staring at me out of glass eyes for the rest of my natural existence, you're mistaken, Davie Lockhart. I loved that cat, Davie."

The smile which had disappeared during this brief tribute to Roger, returned in full force.

"Oh, my! and—'does she play on the piano?'"

The joke had finally penetrated Mr. Lockhart's comprehension. He was of Scotch extraction, which must explain the slowness with which he caught up. He took one knee in both hands now and laughed aloud. It was not the first time he and Mirandy had privately rehearsed the first act in the drama which John Milbank and Marianne Mackaye were playing in, as leading gentleman and lady, up there among the Lake George hills.

"'And will I have to take her in a skiff every time I get into one?'" said the old man.

"'Or teach her how to row?'" said the old woman;
"'or help her up all the steep hills?'"

"'Or strip birch bark for her?' Where are they now, mother?"

"Gone over to Tea Island."

"Tea Island? There ain't anything there to see nor to do. Just about an acre of rocks and bushes that nobody don't notice since the hotel folks stopped having high teas there in picnic style."

"There ain't much to see, I'll grant you, but what there is of it will be new to Nannie, and there's always plenty of huckleberries over there. I just asked the doctor and her plump out if they wouldn't go over and pick a bucketful for to-morrow's baking. I'm afraid the doctor's sort of weakening on pumpkin pie. He don't eat like he used to, Davie."

"Mother, I hope you don't want to put your finger in that sort of pie."

"What sort of pie, Davie?" Mrs. Lockhart's tones were positively dulcet.

"That sort," jerking a hairy thumb towards an emerald-green islet, which lay just on the other side of the lake, in full view. "M'nœuvering to get folks married is a risky business, mother; mighty risky."

Mrs. Lockhart seemed lost in reflection for a moment: "I never saw Nannie as unreasonable and as fractious as she was this afternoon. She wouldn't budge till I said to her, in a whisper, of course, she acted like she was afraid somebody was going to court her; then she picked up that bucket and said, as cool as you please, 'I believe I *will* go with you, Dr. Milbank.' You see, he was tired of coaxing."

"Maybe she don't like him."

"Who don't like who?"

"Nannie mightn't like Milbank." Mr. Lockhart repeated this heresy in the mildest of voices.

“Not like him ! Davie Lockhart, *do* you think the daughter of my own dear mother’s own dear sister *could* be such a ninnie ?”

“Not a ninnie exactly, but she might be a little peculiar in her tastes. You know women-folks are queer sort of things.”

“None of that, Davie ; none of that.” Mr. Lockhart was never permitted to progress very far in his analysis of feminine “queerness.” “You can stuff the birds of the air and the beasts of the field ; nobody can beat you at that, if I do say it, who shouldn’t ; but when you come to talking about women-folks you’re getting beyond your depths, Davie ; you’re getting into deep water.”

The old taxidermist accepted this just rebuke with a patient smile, leaned over and helped himself to one of the apples he had thrown into his wife’s lap, and began silently peeling it, letting the long, red, curling skin unwind itself slowly.

“Shall I throw it over my head, mother, and see if it makes an M ? You know that used to be the fashion in our days.”

Mrs. Lockhart smiled into the ruddy old face beneath her. Matrimony had been entirely satisfactory to her and Davie. Suddenly she jumped up and, untying her apron-strings, laid the apron, beans and all, across the old man’s knees.

“Just finish ’em for me, will you, Davie ? They’ll be coming home hungrier than wolves presently. I think I’ll beat up a few batter-cakes for supper.”

And she disappeared within doors, leaving her husband confirmed in his opinion that women folks were a queer sort of things.

“If they come back engaged,” he said, reflectively, turning his keen old eyes towards Tea Island, “they won’t know whether they’re eatin’ sawdust or pound-cake; and if they come back—the other way—what good’ll batter-cakes do? That’s the way I had ’em.”

Mr. Lockhart evidently included his own courting days with his measles and mumps and other sharp attacks of *things*.

But it was with no fatuous desire to furnish Mrs. Lockhart with huckleberries for her Saturday’s baking that Dr. Milbank had fallen so readily in with her suggestion about Tea Island.

He had found his landlady’s cousin rather inaccessible for the last week or ten days, and, as he had purposely stayed over with a view to asking her a direct question, he did not intend to be thwarted of his purpose or of an answer.

Three weeks’ residence under the same roof with this stately woman, who rarely ever smiled, who never talked nonsense, who showed herself quick of perception and ready of sympathy, had satisfied him fully on one point. He should like very much to make her his wife and put her at the head of an establishment in New York City. “She would grace the position.”

Before they got through with what he openly pronounced “a babes-in-the-woods occupation,” Marianne was aware of the ordeal before her. She had conscientiously insisted upon the bucket being filled with huckleberries before conversation became possible. The exercise, or her nervous hurrying from spot to spot, had brought a brilliant color into her smooth white cheeks. John Milbank was sure he had never seen so absolutely

beautiful a woman ; and he wanted all that beauty for his very own.

The buckets were spilling over with berries, but Marianne was still flitting restlessly from bush to bush. He must force her to stop. He did not intend proposing to her back, however graceful it might look as he patiently trudged in her wake, with berry-encumbered hands. He dropped the bucket on a rock with sudden resolution.

“Miss Grayson !”

If she had been a naughty patient refusing to take a dose of his prescription he could hardly have called her name more authoritatively.

“Dr. Milbank !”

She turned a haughty, flushed face towards him. He put out both hands beseechingly. Then the flush died out of Marianne's face, leaving her as white and rigid as the statue in her old studio home.

“You must know I want to talk to you, and yet you flit before me like some white-winged bird determined to elude pursuit.”

“I am not so helpless as your pretty simile would imply. We have done what we came to do ; why not go back to the house ? We can talk there.”

“Done what we came to do ? Do you suppose I rowed across that lake for huckleberries ?”

“That is what I came for.”

She sat down on a moss-covered stump. She was trembling—trembling so that his keen and practiced eye would detect it if she stood there before him, with nothing to lean against.

“That is not what I came for.”

He stood there before her, looking down upon her from a great height as it seemed to her, sitting there on the low stump. The sun was just dropping below the hills, and the little islet was all aglow with his parting kisses. It got dark there very early, and the purple shadows would soon be staining the waters of the lake. If it must come, let it come. She had tried in every way to keep this acquaintance on a common-sense plain. She had failed with him. How about herself? She could have cried aloud there to the falling shadows, "Failure, failure, failure!" Presently she heard his voice above her, not quite steady in its tones, but intense and musical:

"I think you know already, Miss Grayson, what I want to say to you. You are not the type of woman who is always profoundly surprised when a man puts into words the devotion he has been showing in deeds for any length of time—weeks, in our case. I think you already know that I am in love with you, do you not?"

He stopped deliberately for an answer to this direct question. She was sitting with folded hands before him, her eyes upraised to his with a calmness in them which he could not interpret.

"Yes," she said, "I know it."

"And I think, also, you must know that when a man like myself—by that I mean a man who has not frittered away life in drawing-rooms—tells a woman that he loves her, it can mean but one thing."

"Marriage."

The word came huskily from her dry lips.

"Yes, marriage." A smile of ineffable sweetness flashed across his face. "I did not know I should be

such a clown in the hour of trial ; but oh, my dear, if you could only trust your future to me I would try so very hard to make it a bright and happy one, though I may not have a practised wooer's tongue."

He held out his hands to her once more. It was a caressing gesture, as if he would draw her then and there into the shelter of the arms that were to ward off all peril, all hardship, from her pathway in future. After what seemed an eternity of torture she heard herself answering him with a sort of fierce vehemence :

"Dr. Milbank, you don't know what you are saying. You might as well talk of love and happiness to this stone my foot is resting on. It could just as readily respond. Put it in your bosom and it would give you just as much comfort as I could. I have been afraid of this moment, and I have tried to spare you and myself this interview. I ought not to have come here ; it was cowardly."

"Cowardly?" He was looking at her perplexedly. In the manifold manifestations of woman's nature which had been unfolded to John Milbank, the physician, this was the most puzzling to him as John Milbank, the lover.

Why should she call her coming there with him cowardice? Poor child, she hardly knew what she was saying.

"I know you are not happy," he said, looking down into her white, quivering face with grave tenderness. "I have known that since the first moment I ever saw you. I wanted to comfort you then—I want to comfort you now—if only I may."

"Then?" she repeated, dreamily.

"Yes. It was one morning very early. You were on a Hoboken ferry-boat; and when you left it you dropped this. I advertised it, but, got no answer. I have carried it about with me ever since. I thought, dear, that some time or other it might be the means of bringing us together. I don't think I knew then that I had fallen in love with you, but I know it very, very well now." His smile was exceedingly wistful.

He had laid the photograph on her knees. She had given it only a glance.

"Father's photo. I had just left him. I meant to have painted him from this. Yes—I remember now—I missed it."

"And—forgive me, my dear, but I want so very much to get beyond this vague barrier that stands between my one love and me—you had parted with him in anger, perhaps?"

Marianne's lips quivered like a hurt child's. The hard brightness of her eyes was quenched in sudden tears.

"Yes, we had parted in anger."

"Something that I might easily set right, perhaps, but which you, with your sensitive soul, are brooding over until—"

"No, you cannot set it right. Father was angry with me—because—because—I had just left my husband—left him voluntarily and finally." She was standing before him in a defiant attitude.

"Your—husband?"

"My husband."

Better to make him despise her utterly and entirely!

It would be the surest road back to peace for—him, was the way she reasoned.

He walked away from her with his arms folded and his head dropped. “As if the shame were his,” she said, looking after him with dry, glittering eyes. Her bosom was heaving tumultuously.

He was gone a long time. The purple shadows deepened on the water. The green of the hills turned to sombre black. The gay little boats that plied the waters all day long with summer idlers had all disappeared. Marianne shivered as she sat there alone, in a world from which the last ray of light had suddenly been extinguished. Life wore such a leaden hue.

She heard him coming back towards her. If only he had kept on and on and on, and never again turned that changed face toward her!

“I think, perhaps, Mrs. Lockhart will be growing uneasy about you. You will have to let me take you home,” he said, with cold politeness.

She got up slowly and followed him along the narrow, brambly walk between the rocks. How old and dull she felt! but how glad that he knew the truth about her at last!

They reached the cave where Dr. Milbank had shoved the skiff securely up between two rocks on their arrival. He was in front of her. She heard him give a startled exclamation, then he turned towards her abruptly:

“We have either had a fool’s trick played us or else I fastened the skiff insecurely. It is gone.”

“Gone! And we are here without any means of getting home?”

“You will have to remain here until I can send a boat for you. I will swim to the mainland. It is nearer than Lockhart’s. I will send a boat back for you immediately. You are not afraid?”

“To stay here?”

“Yes.”

“No, I am not afraid.”

He was laying his coat and hat on the rock where he had already deposited his shoes. She had no fears for his personal safety. She knew he had swam from her cousin’s to this island many a time for pastime. She moved a step nearer to him. If she could but hear him say something in kindness—at least in forgiveness—before he went!

“I am not afraid,” she said again, looking at him with pleading eyes, “but before you go I want to hear you say one thing, Dr. Milbank, only one.” (She meant never to look upon his face again.)

“And that is?”

“That you will try not to judge too——”

“I shall not judge you at all,” he said, icily. “As to why you left your husband—when—where—I am utterly indifferent. I have not spent a thought in that direction since recovering from my first shock of amazement at hearing that you were a wife. Of the deception you have practised upon me; of the heartless coquetry which permitted me to associate with you daily as I have done, showing you attentions which, when shown by a man of honor, could mean but one thing, I can find no words of condemnation strong enough.”

He turned from her and, walking swiftly towards the water’s edge, plunged boldly in. She could hear him

striking out with firm, steady arms. Then it grew very still there on the islet.

She knelt down by the things he had laid aside. She pressed her lips to the coat he had worn. One cry of agony broke from her—only one. “Oh, God! I love him. I shall love him forever!”

She felt something hard in the pocket of the coat she sat there caressing with fond, foolish hands. She drew it out. She knew beforehand that it was the photo. From another pocket she produced his lead-pencil. There was still light enough to trace a few lines:

“I wish I could have made things plainer. I am nothing but a source of misery to myself and to every one I love. Better that I should be out of the way.”

She had completely lost control of herself. Why she had written those lines on the back of her father's photograph she did not know. She had a vague idea that to-morrow he would read them, and perhaps grow softer toward her. To-night—ah, to-night!—his heart was frozen. There was nothing in it but gall and loathing for her. She thrust the picture and the pencil back in the coat pocket.

Then she got up and walked—tottered, rather—away from the spot where his things lay, walked away in the darkness and the stillness toward the other end of the little islet.

He had said he would send back for her; he would not come himself; and yet, when it came to ordering a hireling to row over to Tea Island and bring Mrs. Lockhart's cousin back home, Dr. Milbank found he could not do it. He would go with the men. He would bring her back himself, and then—well, then—it was

high time he was back in town. Bah ! what a fool he had made of himself !

He had been gone scarcely more than an hour when he got back to Tea Island with two strong rowers. His coat, hat, and shoes lay just where he had left them. He sprang up the rocky bank and got into them with nervous haste. Marianne was not in sight. He walked a little way inland, stopped and listened, then called. His lips curled a little as he called aloud for "Miss Grayson."

The rowers climbed the rocky path after him. They joined in his search. No one could get lost on such a tiny islet, they assured him. "A man's voice could be heard throughout the length and breadth of it."

Three men's voices were lifted up. The rocks sent the sounds back in mockery ; the water washing the feet of the rocks was the only other sound they heard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“FRIENDS of the promising young sculptor, Mr. Randall Mackaye, whose handsome face and figure were seen often in fashionable parlors during the past spring, will regret to hear that he has completely broken down under the strain of the severe labor he imposed upon himself during the recent heated term, and that he now lies suffering from an attack of nervous prostration, in his rooms, Studio Building, North Washington Square.

“Mr. Mackaye’s genius is equalled only by his ambition. He has for several years been industriously at work upon a statue, from which he deservedly hoped to reap fame and fortune. It was his fatal resolve to complete this statute in time for the next Academy opening which led to his overworking himself.

“His masterpiece now stands finished in his studio, but if his own vigorous young life is to be sacrificed to it, one can hardly give it the full meed of praise its transcendant merit claims.”

Perhaps of the thousands of eyes which were arrested by those three paragraphs in the *City Sewer*, for November of a certain date, in an uncertain year, three pair only read them a second time, and reading them, pondered them anxiously.

Jeanne Lenox always read the *City Sewer*. It was “spicy.” It “carved people up with such a nice sharp knife.” Even Miss Hildah was not above suspicion of

having occasionally surreptitiously perused and enjoyed its highly-spiced malice.

Jeanne read that statement about Randall Mackaye, and, bending her pretty head low over the paper, cried tempestuously for a little while in a really heartbroken fashion.

That accounted for everything!—accounted for Randall's not having been near her since they parted at Mrs. Chiltern's; accounted for his queer, short replies to the notes she had sent him, conveying gentle little reproaches for his neglect of "his best friends." "Poor dear!" he had been killing himself trying to get that statue done, so that he could take his place before all men—his proud, rightful place as a genius. As if she cared for anything but him—just him—just as he was! And now—perhaps—he was going to die, and her father in Europe, and she nothing but a poor helpless girl, and nobody to help him!

Florence should find out for her just how ill he was. If very ill, she would go to him—go to him in spite of the whole world. He was hers—and she loved him! No wonder Jeanne's tears flowed hot and fast.

Dolly Chiltern read it. Dolly always read the *City Sewer* when he was in town. It was "so deucedly personal" that one knew just exactly what everybody was up to without the trouble of personal inquiry. He would go straight to Mackaye. The fellow must be lonely, and it wasn't his fault that Jeanne Lenox had chosen to give her affections to a penniless Bohemian rather than to him, Dolly Chiltern, worth half a million in his own right. He would "stand by Mackaye."

Mrs. Roper read them and turned anxiously to look

at the date. The *City Sewer* was not in her line. This copy had been left in her reception room by a fashionable customer. It was a week old. He might be dead and buried in that time! And, whatever he might be, however he may have treated her, all was forgotten now, and she only remembered the child she had promised to care for all her life.

In tremulous haste she got into her very best dress and bonnet. Some of his fashionable friends might happen in while she was there, and she shouldn't like Ran to be ashamed of her.

It was with a feeling akin to awe that she stepped into the studio. The janitor had pointed it out to her. It was so entirely unlike anything she had ever seen before, with its litter of white plaster casts and ghostly busts and pictures, and there, mysteriously draped, "that tall *thing*," which must be the statue he had almost killed himself working at.

On a sofa-bed, so placed that his sad eyes, when open, must rest on it, lay Randall, his black hair matted over his broad, white forehead, and one long, thin hand lying upon the back of the sofa. His eyes were closed when Mrs. Roper tiptoed cautiously towards him. She stood over him, with her best black-kid gloves crossed meekly in front of her; there were tears in her gentle eyes.

"Ran," she said softly, bending over him with hushed breath.

He opened his eyes, but evinced no surprise or emotion at her presence. He simply gazed at her.

"It's me, Ran; your sister, Rebecca."

"I know you, Becky, and—I am glad to see you. Find a chair for yourself, won't you?"

The tears sprang afresh into good Mrs. Roper's eyes, tears of sorrow, perhaps, at seeing Ran—her Ran, who had looked so gay and handsome and strong that night, sitting there in the square, lying here so white and wan and helpless ;—tears of gratitude, perhaps, for the tardy words, “I am glad to see you.”

“I thought perhaps, if there was nobody you'd rather have, Ran, you'd let me stay here and nurse you. I read about you in the papers.”

“There's nobody I'd rather have, Becky—it is good of you to come, and I am glad to see you. You won't mind if I go to sleep. I am very tired. Kiss me, Becky. Kiss me good-night as you used to a long time ago—a pardoning kiss, sister.”

She stooped down and kissed him. That kiss bridged over all these long years of neglect. It was the Ran of long ago come back to her. She laid her bonnet and gloves aside, and stole about noiselessly setting things straight while he closed his eyes. She heard him sigh once—a tired sigh ; then he lay quite still.

There was no end of medicine bottles standing all about ; and there were bouquets in various stages of decay. These Mrs. Roper bundled unceremoniously into a basket and, carrying them to the elevator, asked the elevator boy if he would kindly dump them in the street : “The smell of 'em is enough to kill a well man.”

“Them's the young lady's flowers. Did *he* say dump 'em out ? She fetches 'em every day.”

“Which young lady ?” Mrs. Roper looked at the basketful of flowers anxiously. Perhaps she was going a little too fast. Ran might be angry.

"The one that comes 'bout dark. She's a stunner. Better-looking than the one that staid here at first with him. We all thought that one was Mrs. Mac."

Mrs. Roper's eyes dilated with horror. What depths of iniquity her poor Randall must have sounded! She supposed all artists were that way, however.

"I am Mr. Mackaye's sister," she said, with spirit, "and I have come here to nurse him. I shall see that no one else intrudes on him."

"All right, mum. I guess he needs a sister or some womankind to take him in hand. I can tell you—"

The electric button below cut short the elevator boy's confidence. He drew the sliding door between him and Mrs. Roper, and shot downward.

A doctor came, looked at Randall, looked at the glass by his side, gave a few directions to Mrs. Roper, who simply announced herself as his nurse, and went away. Randall still slept.

A young man came, a tall, fair-haired, clear-eyed young man, who greeted Mrs. Roper courteously, bent solicitously over Randall, put a basket of grapes near the sofa, and, leaving a message from "Dolly Chiltern," went away.

No one else came. The short November afternoon wore away quickly. It was growing dusky in the studio. Out there in the corridors the gas was alight. Mrs. Roper cast about for something which would produce a mellow light in the studio. Nothing suitable could she find but the antique lamp, swinging by its three silver chains, in the arch of the alcove where stood that shrouded "*thing*."

She climbed on a chair to light it. "One of the sort

of things the foolish virgins carried," she made no doubt. The yellow flame responded quickly to her match. It cast soft shadows over and about the veiled statue, over and about Randall, lying there in a dull sleep, over and about a girl's form which was suddenly framed in the open doorway. She held a bunch of rose-buds in her hand.

Mrs. Roper glided noiselessly towards the door, bristling all over with virtuous indignation. Putting her two hands on the intruder's shoulders she quietly backed her into the corridor, until she had her immediately under a gas jet, all the time peering angrily into the veiled face.

"Now, madam, who are you and what are you doing here? Heavens! Miss Lenox!"

Her sacrilegious hands dropped from the shoulders of Jeanne's velvet basque and hung limply by her sides. "I might have known that basque, anyway," the little reflection shot through her in that one second of amazement.

"Roper!"

The recognition was mutual. Jeanne bore no malice for the recent assault upon her. She clasped both hands about her assailant's neck. Her pretty face was pale and woebegone.

"Don't keep me from him, Roper. I did not know you were a nurse. But I'm glad it is you who are with him, Roper. Oh, don't keep me from going in. He does not know it. I come always when I know he will be asleep. I should die—if I could not."

Mrs. Roper could feel her trembling in her grasp. After all, if Randall got well this pretty thing would

make him a sweet wife. But what a risk the poor, motherless thing was running !

“ Miss Lenox, are you engaged to that young man in there ? ” she asked, gently.

“ Yes—no—that is— Oh, Roper ! I know I am putting myself completely in your power, but——”

“ You are safe with me, Miss Lenox ; but there’s the world at large.”

The girl snapped her little fingers fiercely. “ *That* for the world at large ! I love him. He loves me. He would not speak out, because I was rich and he was poor. Oh, my love, my love, how could you be so foolish ? ”

She pushed by Roper and, gliding noiselessly into the room, knelt for a second with clasped hands at the head of Randall’s lounge. It seemed scarcely a moment before she stood by Mrs. Roper, with shining tears in her big eyes.

“ I have not harmed him, Roper. He don’t know that I have ever been here. Nobody does but Florence, my maid. If I could not come here and kneel there to ask God to make him well I could not stand it, Roper—I could not stand it. I have left the roses.”

Mrs. Roper traversed the long corridor with the girl’s little hand in hers. Poor motherless, wayward child ! So reckless, and yet so pure ! She wished somebody would lock her up.

When she got back to the studio Randall’s eyes were wide open. A feverish spot burned on both his cheeks. He looked up at her absently, as she bent over him. Then the light of recognition came slowly back into his eyes.

"I thought, maybe, you had gone away from me, Becky. Who did that?"

He pointed feebly toward the swaying lamp.

"I did. I cast about for a lamp that would make a soft light, and that was the only one I could find. A poor, heathenish-looking thing it is, too."

"I like it. I am glad you did it. Would you mind taking that sheet off her face, Becky?" His eyes were fixed eagerly on the statue. "I have not cared to uncover it for anybody else, but I'd like you to see how beautiful she was. Take the sheet off, Becky."

Mrs. Roper walked slowly towards the statue. Poor Ran, he certainly must be wandering, to talk of a thing of marble as *her*. The sheet was off now, and, though the face was not visible from her point of view, the little dressmaker stood back in an attitude of startled wonder and admiring awe, which was not thrown away on Randall.

"You like her, Becky?"

"Like it, Randall! It's superb. She looks as if she had just turned her head away to listen for something she wanted to hear. And her neck, and that arm and hand! Randall, the world will ring with your name after once that thing has been put on exhibition."

"Then it will never ring with my name, Becky."

"Come, now, that's a sick man's fancy. You think, because you are a little done up, the end of all things has come. Wait till I get to coddling you with all the messes you used to love. Ran, don't you remember the time you came home from school with the scarlet fever?"

But he was not listening to her. He was lying on his

side, gazing fixedly at the statue, over whose brow the antique lamp shed a soft, lifelike radiance. He was repeating her own words :

“Listening for something she wanted to hear. Oh, my love, my love, my beautiful, have you not heard it of late? Have you not heard all my remorse, all my love, all my agony, over and over again? Would you come back to me if you could, my sweet? Could you only come back to me from the cold, cold water, and let me hear you say ‘I forgive you,’ would you do it, my beautiful one? Have I not knelt and kissed your marble feet, my own?—have I not pressed my hot cheeks to your little cold hands, darling, and you would not take pity on me? Do you not know, where you are, my dear, that I would not let your image be gazed at by vulgar eyes?”

“Randall!”

Mrs. Roper placed her small, black person resolutely between the statue and those staring eyes on the lounge, and hurriedly replaced the sheet over the figure. He frightened her. He had worked at the beautiful white fiend until she had bewitched him. He started perceptibly as she called his name, and broke his trance. His eyelids drooped heavily. He lifted them to ask :

“Becky, has Mr. Grayson been here?”

“Mr. Grayson?—no—a Mr. Chiltern has been here, and he told me to say, Randall, that he means to bring his own doctor here to-morrow. He says yours is a poor quack, but his will make a new man of you in no time.”

“Dolly is a good fellow—a loyal friend. I don’t deserve his friendship.”

“You deserve everybody’s friendship, Ran. You always did have the knack of making folks love you, Ran, from a little boy up.”

She was smoothing his matted hair back from his forehead. The touch of a woman’s hand was inexpressibly soothing. His eyes closed again, but he was not asleep.

“If Mr. Grayson comes while I am asleep, Becky, make him stay—and—make the old man comfortable, won’t you, Becky?”

“Yes, Ran. But who is Mr. Grayson, dear?”

“He is my father-in-law, and my companion in grief.”

“Your father-in-law, Randall?”

But no sound came from his drawn lips. She leaned forward and studied his face carefully. How beautiful it was!—so clean-cut, so pure in its outlines! “Yes, Ran had always had the fatal gift of beauty. But what could he mean by a father-in-law?”

CHAPTER XIX.

It was when she was giving him his breakfast the next morning, pouring his tea into the saucer to cool it, and buttering his toast for him, "for all the world as if he had just come home from school with the scarlet fever," that Mrs. Roper first fully realized the ravages which illness had made in Randall's massive frame.

Too weak to lift the cup to his lips, he lay there as docile as a little child, and seemingly deaf to her persistently cheerful chatter.

She chattered to him of everything, beginning with his first trousers and concluding with a mysterious allusion to Jeanne's flowers, which were now nodding their pretty heads at him over the edge of a crystal bowl on the stand at his elbow.

Since Mrs. Roper had discovered that the flowers which were enough to "make a well man sick" were Jeanne Lenox's offerings, her views on that subject had undergone material modification.

"Jeanne and Ran would be man and wife some of these days—so it was all right."

"I think I'll just run home for a few minutes and tell 'em I'm not coming, Ran. You see, I didn't know, yesterday, whether you would let me stay or not, so I came off in something of a hurry."

The toast was all eaten up and the tea-cup was empty. She would run home and lay out the work for the girls.

But Ran must not know he was "putting her out" in the least.

"Take those things with you, Becky, and tell them not to bring any more here."

She turned from the glass, where she was tying her black bonnet strings under her chin, to discover what it was she was to take away. It was Jeanne's roses.

"But I can't, dear. That is—oh, Ran, you wouldn't hurt her feelings, would you?"

"Hurt her feelings! Hurt whose feelings, Becky?"

"Hers—she's—the one that brings them—that sends them, I mean. My, how he does stare!"

Mrs. Roper was floundering in deep waters. It had occurred to her, sitting there by Ran's lounge, keeping lonely vigils in the night just gone, that she might possibly smooth the way for these two loving young hearts. If only Ran could be made to understand that his poverty need not keep him and Jeanne Lenox apart, it would be smooth sailing.

Nothing had seemed simpler the night before. She had settled the entire matter with "neatness and despatch;" had married Jeanne and Randall right there by Ran's sofa-bed; had effaced herself completely once more, and seen the happy couple start for a continental tour, all without moving from the patent rocker, which only rocked when she had leaned forward to look into the still, white face on the lounge.

Nothing seemed more difficult, with the prosaic light of a gray November day falling harshly into the studio through its big uncurtained window, with beer trucks trundling noisily by the house every little while, and

Randall staring at her with intensely wide-open eyes, and with such an excessively displeased look about his lips.

“What do you mean, Becky?”

“Nothing, Ran; only I think the roses are lovely, and whoever spent their money on them must have been thinking kind thoughts about you, dear; don't you think so?”

“Did a lady bring these flowers here, Becky?”

Whatever came, Jeanne should not suffer at her hands if she had to lie right through and pray for forgiveness all the rest of her days, was the resolution quickly formed and stubbornly adhered to by Mrs. Roper.

“A young woman, Ran—might have been the waitress, you know, of some of your lady friends, you know.”

“A young woman! Was she slight and graceful?”

“Slight enough, Ran. You know them hard-working girls don't accumulate none too much flesh. I wasn't looking for grace. I was looking for your other slipper.”

“Eyes like a little child's?—big, innocent eyes?”

“Dear me, Ran, you sound like a detective. She may have squinted, for all I know, or worn green spectacles. She wasn't here five minutes” (thank heaven for the privilege of inserting that much truth!), “and you're asking me to describe her like I was a photograph man who had been taking her points for half-an-hour. I'm going now, Ran, and I'll be back within half-an-hour.” She would *not* stay there and have the truth jerked out of her.

"Take the roses with you, Becky; I do not want them. Take them away, Becky.

Mrs. Roper lifted Jeanne's roses from the crystal bowl with mixed emotions. It was a pity Miss Lenox's offering should be slighted in this way, but Ran was so cross and masterful this morning that he must be getting well—and there was solid comfort in *that* thought.

When she got back to the studio, after having laid out the day's work for her girls, Mrs. Roper found two strange men there. They were standing in the big uncurtained window. Randall was sleeping heavily. The men were talking.

These two men presented a very sharp contrast to each other. The older one was quite feeble. His form was bent, his face was deeply furrowed with lines of care, and the finger he had laid impressively on the younger man's broadclothed arm was the trembling finger of an old man. The younger man was listening with the gravest attention to something the other was saying.

She was Randall's sister and his nurse, and if they were talking about Ran she had a right to hear. She came and stood near them.

"I am his nurse," she said. "I've come to stay."

The old man waived her an old-fashioned bow; the younger said curtly:

"He needs you more than he needs me, I imagine, madam."

But the old man was impatient of this interruption. He plucked the other by his sleeve pettishly:

"He may wake up, Doctor, and, as I was saying, I think we ought to do by our doctors as we do by our

lawyers, tell them the whole truth and not leave them to guess at cause from effect."

"You are quite right, sir; I am listening with interest."

It was John Milbank standing there looking down into old Mr. Grayson's face. Ever since, sent by Dolly Chiltern, he had entered the studio and found this feeble old man walking restlessly up and down in front of the sick man's lounge, he had been puzzling over that rugged face, with its searching eyes peering from under their shaggy gray eyebrows. He had not yet connected it with the photograph, which in itself had meant nothing to him, but which, when found with Marianne's agitated scrawl on its back, had suddenly become sacred in his eyes. Photos are often misleading. This old, rugged man had not suggested this.

"I feel like a criminal every time I look at him," the old man was saying, with peevish misery in his voice. "I ought to have known better than to break bad news to him so suddenly; but you see, Doctor—you see, I thought men always found the grit when it was needed, and I thought it was only womankind that had to have things broken to them gradually."

"There is an exploded theory to that effect," said Dr. Milbank, caressing his close-cropped whiskers absently.

"Nobody broke it to me. It came on me like a blow from a hammer in a giant's hand. It came in a telegram from Davie Lockhart—in plain, bold words; but every one of them dropped on my heart like a red-hot coal, Doctor. 'Nannie—is—dead! Drowned.' I suppose Davie couldn't afford to make it longer. But

I 'most wish he had waited to write it in a letter. Telegrams are such hard sort of things, you know."

Dr. Milbank had turned suddenly away from the old man and walked towards the alcove where the shrouded statue stood. He knew now why that rugged old face had haunted him so. That was the father, and—doubtless—that other one, the husband. Queer that he, John Milbank, who rather prided himself on his ability to read character, should have fallen such an easy prey to a beautiful face and a soft voice!

These were the men she had wilfully deserted—why, he was never to know, perhaps. The old man had followed him to the alcove.

"You think I'm consuming your time uselessly, don't you, Doctor? But I thought if you knew the whole truth you might work to better advantage."

"I should like to know the whole truth very much indeed. Sit down, Mr. Grayson."

"Queer how you got hold of my name, seeing there was nobody to introduce us! That is my son-in-law, Doctor, and the 'Nannie' that is dead—was my daughter, his wife. She was a beautiful woman, and we both loved her. I never knew how much he loved her till I came here that morning and broke the news to him without any warning."

"Yes—yes—she was away on a visit, was she?"

"Not just exactly, Doctor. Nannie was a strange creature—one of that fanciful sort that was always looking for the path of duty in some out-of-the-way track and determining to follow it out according to her own lights. She would have been burned at the stake

if she had lived in the days when it was risky to be a Christian.

“Ran wasn’t always the quiet thing you see lying there now, Doctor. I think he and Nannie made a mistake in getting married. But that’s neither here nor there. Then when they moved over to the city here, and Ran got to be run after, like rising artists will, you know, Doctor, Nannie got a sort of morbid notion that she was a millstone ’round his neck, and that he could climb better without her than with her. Then they had a little tiff one day,—young married people will, you know, Doctor,—and he used an ugly word. It was ‘hampered.’ She tried to get him to take it back, but he wouldn’t. Then, you see, she came to the conclusion that he really meant it, and she went away, telling him she meant to leave him free to make the very most of his talents. Nannie was always wilful.”

“And she went away without consulting you?” If this whole matter had concerned persons he had never heard of before, Dr. Milbank’s voice could not have been quieter or his manner more thoroughly self-contained. He was holding himself in with a mighty effort.

“No—she came to see me. Nannie was always good and sweet to me. She told me all that I have told you, that night, and she told me not to worry about her—I should hear from her if she was not well. I have heard, Doctor.”

“Why did you not keep her with you?”

“She would not stay, Doctor. She said Ran would need me. You see, he was an old pupil of mine, and had never got out of the way of sort of leaning on me, and she thought he would not come to me if she was

there. She always believed Randall could do something great if he wanted to—and wasn't hampered."

"Has he justified her expectations?"

The old man pointed to the shrouded statue.

"There stands a work of art which would make the name of that poor boy lying there famous forever."

Dr. Milbank looked at the shrouded figure with an interest that was positively painful. It was the altar upon which *she* had been immolated.

"When will it be put on exhibition?"

"Never."

"No?"

"No. He did not finish it for that. He worked at it like a madman all summer, Doctor. He seemed all at once to realize what a grand, what an unselfish thing his wife had done, and all his vanity, all his littleness seemed to drop away from him in consequence. He came over to see me in Hoboken—I think it was about the first week in August—to hear if I had heard anything of Nannie. I told him I hadn't. He sat thinking a long time, then he said suddenly: 'Father-in-law, I was not worthy of her. I was not worthy to breathe the same air with her. I could not understand her then, but I do now. She will give no sign until the masterpiece is finished and the world calls me great. Then she will come back and be my own loving, forgiving, gentle Nan-nan again. She is watching me from somewhere.' After he got that idea into his head he never seemed happy unless he was at work on the statue. And do you know, Doctor—maybe you, as a physician, may understand this part better than I do—the longer he worked the more in love with it, or with his wife, he

seemed to become, until, by heavens, sir, the passion grew to be a consuming one, and he was never happy away from it."

"Pygmalion and Galatea," said John Milbank, under his breath. It hurt him sorely to think that the woman to whom he had given his heart's first, strong, pure love should ever have been the wife of that vacillating weakling, lying there now, vacillating between life and death.

"Why is the world not to have the benefit of this wife's sacrifice?" he asked, turning curious eyes once more upon the statue.

"Because," said the old man, his voice sinking to a husky whisper, "she stood for the model. It's her—my beautiful child—turned to stone, that stands there."

A consuming desire to see it once, only once, took possession of the outwardly quiet man into whose ears Mr. Grayson had poured this story.

"Might not I be made a solitary exception of? I am not the general public. I will not look on it with profane eyes."

The old portrait-painter turned his eyes anxiously towards the lounge. "Seeing you're his doctor—I—might—"

"He will sleep for an hour yet," said Dr. Milbank, impatiently. "He's very much exhausted. I shall prescribe a tonic."

He obeyed a motion from the old man's hand. Between them they noiselessly drew the portiere in front of the alcove. Then the old man applied a match to the antique lamp, and drew aside the veil that hid the masterpiece from view.

With her beautiful head turned slightly to one side,

her right hand upraised, the left hanging by her side, resting against the folds of marble drapery, she stood.

He had seen her just in that attitude, when, turning once in the water, he had glanced back towards the rock he had left her standing on. She was dressed in white flannel—no spot of color about her. She had lifted her hand, almost as if beckoning him back to her side. In spite of his anger he had then in his heart called her “majestic” and “superb.” Standing there before her effigy he called her so now.

“I think I will go back to Ran; I can’t stand looking at it—yet—Doctor. Put out the lamp, please, when you get through.”

He had heard an old man’s husky voice saying this at his elbow. He had heard the portiere softly lifted and dropped again. Then he stood there alone with *it*—alone with *her*—alone with *his dead*!

How long he did not know. He heard voices in the outer room, among them the sick man’s querulous tones. The old portrait-painter was once more at his elbow, quickly shrouding the statue and extinguishing the lamp.

“Do you wonder now,” he was saying, “that when I put that cruel telegram before his eyes without a moment’s warning, he broke down, Doctor?”

“No, I don’t wonder at *that*.”

What he did wonder at was that the woman whom, thank God! he could once more think of as something truer, stronger, and sweeter than the best woman he had ever known, could have wasted her truth, her strength, and her sweetness on the man whom Dolly Chiltern had sent him there to physic, and for whose benefit he was presently exercising his best professional talents.

CHAPTER XX.

THE note which Dolly Chiltern had written to Dr. Milbank, requesting him "as a personal favor" to call at the Studio Building on North Washington Square and see what could be done for "his friend," Mr. Randall Mackaye, had contained the supplemental request that the doctor on his way back from this visit would drop in at Dolly's club and lunch with him.

Now, Dr. Milbank was a favorite with the entire Chiltern crowd, and, as Mrs. Chiltern always moved into town on the first of November, nothing would have been easier than for Dolly to indicate the house on Fifty-seventh Street as the place of rendezvous for lunch.

But the boy was meditating a kindness, and he felt shy and guilty about it. "Milbank" must manage the entire business for him, and they could talk it over better in one of the snug little private dining-rooms at the club, where the table was to be laid for two, than up home "among the women."

He was waiting for Milbank in one of the library alcoves at the club, at the precise moment when John Milbank was standing behind the portiere in Randall's studio, wrapped in contemplation of the sculptor's masterpiece.

Dolly was poring over a portfolio of engravings. He had seen the things a hundred times before, but he must do something with his eyes while waiting for Milbank.

With his ears he was just then beginning to take note

of the talk of two men in the next alcove. The jutting book-shelves shut them from view, but he believed he knew the voices. The talk had floated about him as the buzzing of insects, until he imagined he heard two names brought into it.

The names were "Jeanne Lenox" and "Mackaye, the masher."

Dolly, with his elbows leaning on the table in front of him, and his chin supported in his palms, flushed from cheek to temple, but sat perfectly still to make sure he was not mistaken.

No, he was not mistaken. Miss Lenox's name came into the talk again. Then he got up, and laying the prints back in their portfolio with precision, he sauntered into the alcove where the two men gossips sat, their feet stretched before the glowing anthracite fire, and their newspapers lying across their knees.

Both were old club-men—men who had tried life in its various aspects and found it lacking in flavor in all of them. Dolly lolled against the mantelpiece, one elbow resting on it as he looked down at them. There was a glitter in his blue eyes, which might have been caught from the flames of the anthracite fire—but was not. One of the men glanced up at him pleasantly :

"Reynolds here was just telling me that Mackaye is down with a low fever. You know him, I believe."

"Yes, I know him. I believe he is ill. Overwork, they say, or something of that sort."

"A man is a fool to work for a living when he can make it without work. But perhaps he has yearnings—fame—immortal glory and all the rest of it, you know."

"Perhaps! There are some men, those who are not

so fortunate as to be born rich and satiated, who do have yearnings, as you call them. Or perhaps Mr. Mackaye has not discovered that secret of making a living without work, which you allude to."

"It has not been the girl's fault if he has not, then."

"Which girl?"

Dolly was still lounging languidly against the low marble mantel. One hand was gloved, and through it he was slowly drawing his empty glove. His glittering eyes were fastened on the men sitting there below him, and his strong young frame was vibrating to the passion that filled every inner recess.

"Which girl? Why Jerome Lenox's daughter. She has made a perfect fool of herself about the fellow, especially since he has been laid up."

Dolly's face blanched, but his voice remained perfectly steady.

"What has she done since he has been laid up?"

"Nothing much—only visited his room every day, carrying flowers, etc., etc.

"Do you know that to be true?"

"I know that to be true."

"Then you are an infernal cad for not keeping it to yourself."

The young voice was still steady, though fierce in its intense scorn, as Dolly leaned forward quickly and drew the fingers of his empty glove across the man's lips.

There was a start of amazement,—an audible oath or two,—a flash of silver hurtling through the air, and then Dolly Chiltern lay quite still, stunned by a blow from a heavy goblet taken from a tray near by.

His assailant was kneeling over him, pouring abject apologies into his ears, when Dr. Milbank entered the room. Between them they got the tall form stretched upon a sofa, and their worst fears were relieved by the doctor's prompt verdict :

"He is only stunned. Will come around presently. I should prefer, gentlemen, that he should see no one but me when he does come to himself."

The men all went away, and Dr. Milbank worked with Dolly alone until the blue eyes opened with a startled expression, and he sat up suddenly, putting his hand to his temple.

"What happened to me? Oh—yes—curse him! Where is he?"

"Stuart?"

"Yes."

"He is gone. But he left his humble apology with me for something. What was it, Dolly? Have you been measuring lances with that antiquated old reprobate? He is an ox for strength, Dolly."

"He spoke insolently of a lady—and—I could not help it. Will this thing show?" he touched his temple with one finger. "Why, you've plastered me!" His face was full of disgust.

"You've got an ugly cut there. The edge of the goblet was sharp."

"And that will involve a lie. I'll have to explain that cut to five different women—tell a distinct lie five times over."

"Let me do it for you," said Dr. Milbank, smiling down into the white, boyish face on the sofa. "I think I can save you the lie, at least."

"Then you'll be saving me the toughest part of it. It's astonishing, Doctor, how good women will drive men into corners. But I say, Doctor, unless Stuart takes it back his apology won't stand. I don't want him to apologize to me for doing *this*."

"I think he means to make it entirely satisfactory. He said you should hear from him. I don't know what you did, but it seems to have enhanced his respect for you."

"Then that's all right. Now, then, tell me about Mackaye. This beastly business drove him clean out of my head for a while."

Dr. Milbank's voice grew decidedly less pleasant :

"It is not a case for physic. The man has overtaxed his strength, and complete rest, with change of scene, is all that can help him."

"I thought as much myself," said Dolly, reflectively ; "and that was the reason I wanted to see you here alone, Doctor. I want you to manage it for me. I don't exactly know how to go about it. You do."

He was stammering and blushing most absurdly.

"You mean that you want to lend him the money to take a trip on, Dolly?"

"Exactly."

"That's good of you, and very much like Dolly Chiltern. But how do you know he can't afford it himself?"

"I take it he is not very prosperous yet. They say he's been banking on this masterpiece of his to bring him in something substantial. But that is not sold yet, you see. I might offer to buy that—couldn't I, now? You see, I don't want him to suspect that it's a sort of

veiled charity, and he would suspect me, Doctor ; but if you were to offer to buy the statue it could not be anything but a purely commercial transaction."

"No, oh no, it could not be anything but a purely commercial transaction with me. But it happens, Dolly, that the statue is not on the market."

"Not on the market !

"No—not even to be exhibited."

"Who says so ?"

"His father-in-law."

"Father-in-law !"

"Yes. It seems that the statue was modelled from his own wife, and it was the shock of hearing that she was dead which brought about this attack."

Dolly Chiltern sat on the sofa, staring into Dr. Milbank's face incredulously. Dr. Milbank returned his stare with eyes absolutely steady and grave. No one could have suspected that the tragedy of Randall Mac-kaye's life touched both these men almost as nearly as it did himself.

"Do you mean to tell me that he has lost his wife *recently*, Milbank ?"

"The eighteenth day of August.

Who knew the date better than he ?

Dolly sprang tempestuously to his feet. His face was purple with wrath. His hands were clenched until the nails indented his flesh. Dr. Milbank watched him in mute perplexity as he made the circuit of the long library, staggering like a drunken man.

"You had better sit down, Chiltern. You've had something of a shock this morning, and you're not at

all steady on your feet. I don't quite understand your present excitement."

Dolly came back to the sofa and fell back upon its cushions with a sigh of profound depression.

"He is an accursed fraud, and I hope he may—"

"Come, don't be childish, Dolly. What are you spitting out baby anathemas for? Has this man Mackaye injured you in any way? He seems to be in a good many people's way."

Dolly looked up piteously. He would like very much to tell Milbank the whole story—but—perhaps—now that the wife was dead, Mackaye and Jeanne would get married, and then the gossips' tongues would cease wagging. There was no knowing how much a woman would forgive a man if she loved him.

"Do you suppose he—Mackaye, knew his wife was living up to August, Doctor?" he asked, hoarsely.

Dr. Milbank looked at him contemptuously.

"Is it likely a man should have a wife living, a handsome wife, too, Dolly, from whom he had never been divorced, and *not* know it?"

"But she is dead now?"

"She is dead now."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

(Who so sure as he?)

"Thank God!"

"For what? For the death of a woman? Perhaps she was a true woman, Dolly, who could not bear contumely and neglect. Perhaps she was a brave woman, who dared follow her convictions even though they led her through the valley of the shadow of death. Per-

haps she was a beautiful woman, who might have made the sunshine of some other man's life, some man who knew how to deal with so fine a spirit."

"Perhaps—granted—all that and more. Still—thank God! For now her fair fame can be saved. One preys upon another, Doctor."

He buried his head in the sofa cushions, and it seemed as if he would never raise it again. His frame was convulsed with a burst of grief which was no disgrace to his young manhood.

John Milbank walked over to one of the windows and stood staring out into the street. It looked out over the avenue, and a stream of glittering equipages, filled with well-dressed women, rolled by the line of his vision. They might have been so many stuffed dolls, in toy perambulators, for all he saw of them.

He had gone back, as was his constant custom now, if he granted himself a moment's retrospection, to that moment when he had turned away from Marianne, with hot words of condemnation, and left her standing, majestic in her mute sorrow, upon the rocks of Tea Island.

"I was a brute—a maddened brute. Even then I knew it."

He felt a touch on his shoulder, and Dolly's arm fell about his neck caressingly.

"I want some advice, Doc, and it's of the sort I can't go to mother or the girls for. You are my only hope."

"If mine will be worth anything to you it is entirely at your service. But let us sit down somewhere."

They walked away from the window arm-in-arm. Dolly led the way into the room where the table had

been laid for their luncheon, and ordered it served.

"We can talk here better. I was trying, as I lay there on the sofa, to make up my mind about something, Doctor, and I can't. I'm not sure of my own motives, you see. That always hobbles a fellow."

"Well, Dolly?"

"I'm in love with a girl, Doctor, a girl whom you will say must fall very little short of perfection, when I tell you that mother and the girls have courted her about as hard as I have. They all wanted it."

"Strong testimony to her worth, Dolly."

"And I believe my chance with her was good, Doctor, more than good, until she met him."

"Whom? The sculptor?"

"Yes — Mackaye." Dolly's clear eyes darkened wrathfully. "You see, nobody knew him for a married man—and—and—he's won her affections, so that she's had no eyes nor thought since for—anybody. I've winced under it, but I thought, until you told me about the wife, that it was all right, and I felt that it would be a shabby thing to let him lay there and die for the want of a little dirty money." Here the boy suddenly lost all control of himself. "He's a scoundrel, Doctor, a black-hearted fraud."

"I quite agree with you, Dolly; but go on."

"And if the wife was living I'd know exactly where I stand. I would go to Mr.—the young lady's father, I mean—and tell him to kick the fellow out of his doors the next time he darkened them. But as the wife is dead——"

"You think it best to let her wed her black-hearted fraud in peace. Is that it, Dolly?"

“Not exactly.” Dolly bowed his head in shame. The humiliation was for the woman he loved. “Not exactly that, Doctor ; but the gossips have got hold of her name—and——”

“Ah, now I understand. By-the-way, my boy, your excitement has started the cut to bleeding again—permit me.”

He went over and stood behind Dolly, arranging a fresh piece of plaster over the cut with cool, skilful fingers. It would be easier for Chiltern to talk with him standing behind him so. Dolly put a hand over his and gave it a slight pressure, which told him he was understood.

“And perhaps I had better let things take their course. You see, she loves him. I know it. And I wouldn’t be sure of my own motives if I meddled. Not at all.”

“She thinks she loves him. She is an untrained little mortal, who has what she calls an enthusiasm for art ; and when art presents itself in the guise of a handsome artist, many a silly heart flutters nervously with what it is pleased to call love. Miss Lenox is no exception to the rule of girls whose views of life are largely determined for them by French maids.”

“Miss Lenox?”—Dolly faced upon him fiercely—“then have you too——”

“Known that you were in love with Jerome Lenox’s daughter? Quite a while, my dear boy. Ever since I saw you together at the last Patriarchs’.”

“She is worthy any man’s devotion,” said Dolly, loyally.

“I don’t doubt it. I don’t doubt it, at all, Dolly ; but as for this other matter.”

“ Well ? ”

“ I think I would let that rest, at least until it is sure that the man will not die.”

“ If money can save him, Doctor, he shall not die. Promise me that ! ”

And Dr. Milbank promised.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. ROPER was in tears.

In point of fact that was getting to be Mrs. Roper's normal condition. She had always been what might be called a "ready crier," with an assorted lot of tears on hand—tears of anger, which she shed when a customer whom she dared not defy proved particularly trying; tears of sympathy, which flowed most readily when she went to the theatre; spiritual tears, so to speak, which were evoked by her minister, and were associated with her Sunday bonnet and her five-button black-kid gloves. But the tears which she shed in the privacy of her own room, the morning after Dr. Milbank had paid his one visit to Randall, were tears of pure vexation, tears of such perplexity as she never had shed before.

"There was the doctor saying Ran ought to leave town, even going so far as to mention Florence distinctly; and there was Ran declaring point-blank he would not go. Not that that amounted to a row of pins, for as like as not when she got back to the studio (she had just run home to see that Mrs. Rockwood's brocade was not utterly ruined) he would be for starting off at two days' notice. And when that notion struck him, who was to go with him? Where was the money to come from?"

Mrs. Roper asked and answered her own questions

with tart energy. Of course she would have to go with him. Of course that five hundred dollars in the bank would have to be drawn out. Ran was her own flesh and blood, and she hoped the time never would come when she should forget what she had promised their mother.

And while she was "gallivanting" all over the world what was to become of her business? This was the question, excogitating an answer to which had finally thrown Mrs. Roper into a condition little short of hysteria.

Some one knocked at the door.

She dried her eyes quickly. Not for a "clean thousand" would she have one of her work-girls find her in tears. They would go right off and report a falling-off in her custom. Her "Come in" was as crisp, as chirrupy as one would care to hear.

Marianne entered the room with a small roll of bills in her hand.

"You are so hard to find lately that I shall have to set a trap for you whenever my room rent falls due."

"Little thought have I been giving to room rent this week." Mrs. Roper spoke disconsolately, but extended her hand for the bills. "There are more things in this world to bother about than money, Mrs. Fawcett."

"Many more. You are in trouble. Can I do anything for you?"

"Not this time. It's a graver matter than getting up a girl's ball-dress. Do sit down, Mrs. Fawcett. It gives me the fidgets to have you standing up and me sitting; but I'm that tired I'm ready to drop."

Marianne seated herself resignedly. Mrs. Roper's

confidences had a propensity to string themselves out tediously, but the little dressmaker had hovered over her like a mother when she got back from her summering, sick at soul and weary of body.

"This is your busy season, I suppose."

"It isn't the work; I'm used to that; but I'm not used to nursing. I'm done up."

"Sickness in the family? Nothing serious, I hope."

Mrs. Roper straightened her cuffs with a little conscious air of pride. After all, a brother whom the papers spoke of, and for whom a rich girl, belonging to the very first, was pining, was not a possession to scorn.

"It is my brother—Mr. Randall Mackaye, the sculptor. You have heard me speak of him."

Over Marianne's face, which, Mrs. Roper said, looked "peaked and whiter than ever, since her trip to Lake George," a wave of crimson swept swiftly.

"What of your brother? Is he very ill?"

"Dear me, Mrs. Fawcett, if you ever read the newspapers you wouldn't have to ask. Didn't you see in the *City Sewer* that poor Ran had worked himself nearly to death to finish a statue? Think of such foolishness!"

"And is it finished?"

"Yes; but it came very near finishing him."

"Is it on exhibition? Has the world passed sentence on it? Do they call him great? Is he famous?"

"Do they call him great?' I call him a bag of bones. 'Is he famous?' Maybe what there is left of him is, but that is precious little. Much good has his marble beauty done him, so far!"

"Have you seen it?"

"Only once; and then I didn't see the face. The

thing stands there finished, but a dusty old sheet hides it from everybody."

Marianne leaned back in her chair with a sigh. This was the moment she had been looking forward to all these months. This first taste of fruition was exceeding bitter.

"I heard the old man tell the doctor that Ran meant never to have it put on exhibition, though I should think some of his rich friends—and he seems to have lots of them—would give him thousands of dollars for it, on the principle of a fool and his money soon parted, you know."

Marianne winced. Was this fame? Was it to hear his masterpiece spoken of as a peddler might speak of his plaster mannikins, that she had stepped aside and given him his freedom? How queer that she should be catching the first echoes of Randall's fame from the lips of this obscure dressmaker! And this marketable thing was the statue into which two lives had been moulded—hers and his.

"Why is the statue not to be exhibited?" At least she would know all that Randall's sister knew.

"The dear only knows. Nobody has honored me with an explanation. All I know I caught by making use of my ears when the old man and the doctor were talking. And I may not even have that straight."

"Well, whatever it is, let me have it."

"Well, I think I heard the old man tell the doctor that since Ran had heard of his wife's death he had sworn the statue should never be exhibited."

Marianne gazed at Mrs. Roper stupidly. Was she inventing a romance? Or was Randall, for evil pur-

poses of his own, giving out the impression that she was dead? She flung this vile suspicion away from her with a gesture of physical repulsion.

“You say his wife is dead?”

“Yes, dead; and the outrageous part of it is nobody knew he had one until the old man let it out, which I wish he hadn’t, for since she is dead, Ran might have done much better and married—there now, how my old tongue does get away with me!”

“Who says his wife is dead?”

Marianne was looking at her dully. It was almost as if she were listening to another woman’s story, one which did not concern her even remotely. Mrs. Roper’s patience was on the wane.

“The old man, I suppose, Mrs. Fawcett. I heard him telling the doctor something about a telegram which he showed Ran too sudden. Both men seem awfully cut up about it.”

“What a pity it isn’t true!”

Marianne laughed aloud, a short, discordant, mirthless laugh, as she uttered those bitter words. Mrs. Roper stared in her turn.

Her lodger had flung her hands outward with a gesture of impatient despair, and was now beating them slowly together, almost as though she were undergoing some sharp physical agony.

“So this is the outcome. This is what comes of having high ideals and trying to force other people to live up to them. How many lives have I ruined?”

Bewildered Mrs. Roper, failing utterly to comprehend this wild outbreak, but catching the words of a strange question, answered stupidly :

“My dear, you don’t look as if you’d ever ruined anybody’s life. What does ail you, Mrs. Fawcett?”

Marianne brought her eyes back to the little black figure in the chair before her.

“I think I will go to him, Mrs. Roper, at once.”

“Go to who?”

“To Randall—your brother—my husband.”

“Randall Mackaye your husband?”

“Yes.”

“And—then you’re not dead, after all. Why, how
——”

Marianne raised her hand imperiously. She would make her explanation but once, and then not to Mrs. Roper.

“No doubt you will soon know all there is to know, Mrs. Roper. At present I must go to Randall and to father.”

Mrs. Roper laid a detaining hand on her arm as she got up from her chair.

“Did you and Ran have a falling-out, Mrs.——”

“Call me Marianne. We are sisters-in-law, you know.”

“Yes, and I always did feel drawn toward you—but was there no divorce, my dear?”

“None.”

Marianne wrenched herself free and went away to get her bonnet and wrap. Mrs. Roper looked after her gravely.

This was not quite so grand a thing as marrying Jeanne Lenox would have been, but as sure as her name was Rebecca Roper she was going to let that sweet girl know how she had been duped. It made her

honest cheeks burn for shame, to think that Randall could have grown up into *that* sort of man.

She was standing on the stoop waiting for Marianne. They left the house together.

“Did you and Ran have a falling-out, dear?”

“No, not as you mean it. I made a mistake. I believed that he would make a position for himself easier and quicker without me than with me. I meant to leave him unhampered for his work. I believe I was more ambitious for him than he was for himself.”

“Unhampered for his work! Unhampered for his deviltry you mean. My dear, don't you know that men like Ran need to be driven to work. I used to have to drive him to school. Yes, you made a big mistake. He'll get well fast enough now, but——”

“But what?”

“Nothing. Only do get him up and away as soon as possible. My head's dizzy with all this excitement. I never was as near daft in my born days. If I don't spoil the next dozen dresses I cut out it will be a special providence preventing.”

As Marianne walked slowly by her side toward the studio, she realized for the first time how heavy was the yoke she was about to assume once more. Her footsteps lagged. Her heart made no plea for the sick man lying yonder. She was going back to do her duty by him; that was all.

In the bitter self-analysis which had formed her chief occupation during the sombre hours of her lonely life, she had said over and over again, in a pitiful sort of self-defence: “I did love him. I loved him with all my pure, young, girlish heart; but he killed it with his

selfishness, killed it with his arrogant acceptance of my all as his simple due. And this is what it has brought us to ! ”

She drew back when they reached the studio door. It was closed. They could hear a murmur of voices inside.

“ Send father to me here—and—prepare him—Randall—for my coming. I must see father first. Just tell him a lady wants to see him.”

She turned from the door behind which Randall lay, and, walking to the farthest end of the long corridor, stood looking out upon the square. The year's first flakes of snow were sifting softly earthward through the leafless branches of the trees. What a sad, gray, old world it was !

She heard a slow, shuffling step coming along the corridor. Then she turned and ran toward the feeble old man who was tottering towards her. Her arms were about his neck, and her tears were raining on his cheeks, before he had fairly comprehended what had happened.

“ I wanted to see you first, father ; you alone. I wanted to beg your pardon for all that I've made you suffer. I did not know until half-an-hour ago what you had endured, father—my patient, precious father.”

“ It has been hard, darling, hard ; but I thought I was being punished for the way I treated you that last night, my sweet. But, thank God ! I've got you back, got you back.”

He was stroking the head that lay on his shoulder with his trembling old hand. Her words of endearment

were poured close into his ears. Yes, it was sweet—sweet to be in each other's arms again.

“But what did Lockhart mean, honey? Such a positive telegram as it was, too! No wonder it mowed Ran and me down.”

Marianne raised her head and pushed her hair back with a weary gesture.

“It was a mistake, father—one more mistake. Everything is a mistake. Don't you think so, father?”

“Yes, dearie; at least it looks that way sometimes. But this particular mistake?”

“Came of believing people to be honest who were dishonest. I was on an island with—a—person. We had gone to get berries for Cousin Miranda. Somebody moved our skiff, for a jest, I suppose, and when he couldn't find it, he swam over to the mainland to get another one. The person, I mean. While he was gone I found our skiff—and—and—I did not want to go back to Cousin Lockhart's, father, so I just rowed myself to the shore, and paid a man I found in a fisherman's hut some money on his promising to take the skiff back to Mr. Lockhart and to tell him the lady was all right. I suppose the skiff was more valuable than I knew, so he just kept it, and as they never heard from me, they sent that cruel telegram. I never thought of such a possibility.”

“Yes, yes. The telegram was what made it hurt so bad. But only this morning, dearie, I got a letter from Miranda, telling me that she had been trying to find out how to get a letter to me, and she and Davie were such poor hands at writing, not having anybody to write to, you see, that it was a big undertaking, especially as

she would not write until she got some black-edged paper to write on ! Think of that, sweet ? ”

The old man laughed gleefully. His heart was light, Nan-nan was back. It was so easy to laugh to-day.

“ It was a real kind letter, Nan-nan. She told me how fond they had all got to be of you up yonder. And she told me how a gentleman boarder of hers most near went wild when they couldn’t find you, and blamed himself for it all. And how he—”

“ Come,” said Marianne, huskily—“ she has prepared Randall for my coming by this time.”

She held his hand and dragged him swiftly along the corridor with her, too swiftly for him to continue his narration. Mrs. Roper was standing in an attitude of helpless despair in front of Randall’s lounge. Her eyes turned wistfully towards Marianne as she entered :

“ Come and do it yourself, or undo it—I don’t know which—I can’t.”

Marianne was not of those who still believed Randall to be made of such very fine porcelain that he must be handled with exceeding care. Her own theory of his breakdown was that he had simply worked very hard during a hot season, as much from ennui as anything else, and was suffering the consequences of his imprudence.

She came and leaned over him :

“ It was a mistake, Randall, that telegram. I will tell you more when you are stronger. Are you glad to see me back now—that the masterpiece is done ? ”

He lifted himself on his elbows, turned his startled eyes upon her, and then fell back among the pillows,

trembling violently. From beneath his closed lids two great tears rolled over his thin cheeks.

It was an unexpected display to Marianne. Perhaps, after all, there were depths here she had never sounded.

She knelt down by his side and, smoothing his long black hair away from his sunken temples, kissed him gently on the forehead.

He turned his lips toward her ear to whisper :

“Nan-nan, forgive me. I never knew what you were to me until I thought I had lost you forever. But I knew you would come back to me, *ma belle*, if you were alive.”

He had his arms about her, and she was smoothing his brow with soft, soothing touches.

Mrs. Roper stole away and went home. “The reconciliation was beautiful to see, and, thank heaven! she wouldn’t have to go to Florence.”

Mr. Grayson brushed his hand across his brow and tiptoed out into the corridor : “The reconciliation was complete, and man and wife were truly *one* once more.”

When they were alone, Marianne drew herself out of her husband’s arms to ask the questions which were scorching her very heart :

“Randall, did you want me to come back? Did I make a mistake in thinking you could work better without me? Have you found out whether you need me or not?”

He was looking at her critically, as she still knelt there before his lounge, her hands clasped tightly, her large eyes fixed supplicatingly on his face. Already the glad surprise of having her back was tempered by a

great dissatisfaction. She had grown almost plain. She looked old and haggard.

“Need you, Nan-nan? I need you every hour.”

The words left nothing to be desired. The tone—everything. He turned his eyes from her face to the statue :

“It is finished, Nan-nan. Go and look at it. I want to know what you think of it. Idealized, you will say.”

Marianne got up from her knees and, walking over to the alcove, unveiled the statue. She stood before it a long, long time in that quaint attitude of deliberate criticism which Randall remembered so well.

But she was not criticising it all that time. She was thinking of all the strange things that had come to pass since she had stood just so before. She was thinking of all the lives that had become involved about that marble effigy of herself. Jeanne Lenox, spoiled, reckless, ignorant—passed before her ; and John Milbank, haughty, scornful, indignant—as she had last seen him.

“Well?”

Randall was calling to her in a voice tinged with the old-time imperious impatience.

“It is a grand piece of work. It is perfect. I am proud of—it. But you are right ; it is idealized.”

“You have lost tone, *ma belle*—grown a trifle angular. But we will both come back from Florence as good as new. Read that.”

He took a note from the stand at his elbow and threw it into Marianne’s lap. It was a note from a downtown banker, offering him six thousand dollars for his masterpiece.

“And you will take it?”

“Without question. When that idiotic telegram came I felt for a little while that there was too much of you in it, Nan-nan, for me to convert it into hard cash ; but now that I have you back I see it in a different light.”

“Yes—of course.”

Then he entered with feverish unrest into the details for their journey. He thought of Jeanne Lenox, and fancied he should be more comfortable if the sea were between them until “the thing had blown over.”

He had made an awful fool of himself in that direction, but he didn't suppose he was the first man who had ever made a fool of himself. On the whole it was very comfortable to lie there and watch Marianne moving about the studio.

And Marianne?

She recognized more clearly than ever that she had across to bear.

He had not missed her ; he had missed her ministrations. He had not sorrowed over her ; he had mourned for the desolation that made life such a dismal affair for him. He had not completed the masterpiece of his life from any lofty idea of achievement ; it had been a great means to a small end. He was the same splendid egotist who had gone away from the studio that morning with a cruel taunt upon his lips. But she had cast her one die—and lost.

With a sense of defeat upon her she once more took up her cross.

CHAPTER XXII.

JEANNE LENOX, stationed behind the lace curtains of the parlor windows in her own home, was also watching those first snow-flakes of the year.

At least, so it appeared to Miss Hildah, who was lounging in a big chair before the fire. In reality, Jeanne was watching for Florence.

She had sent her maid on an errand, and she had been in a dozen different minds about that errand in as many minutes since dispatching her.

The embroidered edges of the lace curtains were suffering at her hands. Her nervous little fingers had tugged at them with such unconscious energy that they had yielded to the unusual strain in several places, showing ugly, jagged rents.

She was certain that Florence had been absent long enough to have gone to the studio and back "forty times." She had never ventured there herself since encountering Mrs. Roper; but how could she let the days roll over his "poor, sick head" without letting him know that somebody besides the doctor and the hired nurse was thinking about him and caring for him?

Had she not told him that she would wait patiently until he was great? And would it not comfort him now in his pain and loneliness to know that she was not forgetting her promise?

She was sure she had done just the very "best

thing," and she was not at all sorry. Only, if that horrid Florence would not dally so.

A moment later Miss Hildah, turning her eyes toward the window to make an observation to her niece upon the execrable promptness with which fall had set in, found that Jeanne was not there. She had disappeared with the most mysterious suddenness, "without even the rustle of a petticoat," the old lady muttered querulously, taking refuge once more in her crochet work.

Jeanne's watch really had terminated with remarkable suddenness. She had seen Florence—and—in her hands were the flowers she had sent Randall Mackaye and what looked like her own note.

She was in her own room by the time Florence found her, tossing the contents of her top bureau drawer about with a reckless assumption of indifference which was entirely thrown away on the experienced French-woman.

Florence walked across the room and placed the roses in a pitcher of water, before making her report.

"We have made a mistake," she said, coolly, laying Jeanne's note down on the toilette table before her.

The wax seal was unbroken.

Mistress and maid looked at each other silently. Jeanne's face was white to the very lips, and there was a startled look in her great innocent eyes.

"I am sorry I could not deliver them, but it was impossible."

"And—why?"

"Because Monsieur's wife has returned, and it would have been manifestly indiscreet. I could not risk my young lady's reputation so thoughtlessly."

“His—wife!”

Florence, the maid, experienced a fleeting sensation of pity. After all, this white, trembling girl before her was not a Lady Eunice. But “this white, trembling girl” had once tried to dismiss her insolently, and Florence never forgave.

“Monsieur’s wife,” she repeated. “It would seem that their quarrel is quite made up. The janitor says everybody is happy, and now Monsieur will get well. Let us hope so.”

She knew that every word which fell from her thin, cruel lips struck its own distinct stab to the young heart of her mistress. Jeanne made a feeble effort to say something, but she could find neither words nor voice. She would like to say something calm and cleverly deceitful—something which would make Florence believe that she had known all along that Randall Mackaye had a wife, and that her own courtesy to him had been simply the courtesy of an art patron.

Poor little Jeanne! No clever lie would come at her bidding. She just sat there before her tormentor, feeling all the rich, warm blood that had been bounding in her young veins turning to ice, and leaving her cold and numb. She shivered as if with a physical chill. She was slowly tearing the note into bits.

Florence was behind her in a moment, tenderly wrapping a shawl about her trembling shoulders.

“And, Miss Lenox, I have other news for you. My friend, the janitor, gave it to me. He got it from the elevator boy at the studio building, and I believe the elevator boy heard it from the man of the gentleman

who picked Mr. Chiltern up, but of that I am not quite sure."

In a bewildered way Jeanne gathered that her maid had picked up some news among the lacqueys; but why should she intrude it upon her? What was Dolly Chiltern to her? Florence had meant to divert her. Well, she would be diverted, if only to show her that this news about the sculptor meant nothing to her—literally nothing.

She turned her face towards the open drawer once more, and bent over a mass of tangled ribbons.

"Well, Florence, what about the gentleman's man, and the elevator boy, and Mr. Chiltern who was picked up? That has such a disreputable sound."

"The janitor says he is very badly injured, perhaps will carry the scar to his grave. At least, so one of the waiters at the club told the gentleman's man who picked him up. I mean the man of the gentleman who picked him up."

"Scar to his grave! Poor Mrs. Chiltern! She must be almost crazy. But what was he doing? Did your footmen and your waiters tell you that?"

"He was defending a lady's honor. Mr. Chiltern is of the knightly sort, only Miss Lenox never seemed to discern it."

Jeanne was looking at her again with that wild, hunted look, which ought to have disarmed her, but it did not. On the contrary, this "affair" had so many points of similarity with her dear Lady Eunice's romance that Florence quite revelled in it. As a rule she had found service in America rather devoid of interest.

The American women were tame, flat, timid. None of them had the *esprit* of her dear Lady Eunice.

It was suddenly borne in upon Jeanne that Dolly may have been fighting her battle. She laughed recklessly. Better brave it out if she could. She supposed that was all that a woman could do when she found her name was being dragged through the mire. There was a fevered spot on her cheeks now, and her eyes were literally ablaze.

“Who was the lady, Florence, that Mr. Chiltern defended in drayman’s style? Did your footman give her name?”

“I do not know the lady’s name. My friend the janitor did not give it to me. I thought Miss Lenox would be interested, because she knows Mr. Chiltern and his lady mother and all the sweet young ladies of the family.”

“Yes—I—am—sorry. Poor Mrs. Chiltern!”

She was not thinking of chivalric Dolly Chiltern. She had forgotten all about him, even as the words passed her lips. She was thinking of Randall Mackaye, and of the intensity of her hatred for him. How “queer” that one drop of gall could turn love into hatred with such celerity!

She was casting about her confusedly for some way out of this *esclandre* which should not make total wreck of her self-respect. Her ideas of right and wrong seemed suddenly turned topsy-turvey. She was glad her father was still in Europe. Things “blew over,” she supposed. But, oh for some strong, wise, good woman friend!—somebody to put loving arms about her and tell her what to do, what to say, what to leave

undone, what not to say ! Could she ever face the world again ?

And while Jeanne wrestled alone with the horror and the shame of Randall Mackaye's perfidy, Miss Hildah sat by the parlor fire crocheting a woollen cap to be put in the next missionary box, and Florence moved noiselessly about the room, laying out Jeanne's dinner-dress.

These two were all the girl's womankind !

"I suppose we will hear it all to-morrow," said the Frenchwoman, carefully pulling out the ribbon bows on the sleeves of the dress she had thrown on the bed. Her back was turned to Jeanne.

"Hear what in the papers to-morrow ?"

"About the trouble at the club—the lady's name, and so on. Fortunate lady ! Now she will become the fashion ! My Lady Eunice one said——"

She heard a short, quick gasp behind her. Jeanne's head fell forward on the toilette table before her. She had fainted.

Florence laid her quietly on the bed and cut her corset strings. She was well-trained in such service. It made her think better of Jeanne. She was not such a little plebeian after all. It was only your true aristocrat who could and did suspend animation at the proper juncture.

Jeanne opened her eyes after awhile and looked up into the cynical face of her French maid. She could never remember looking into a mother's eyes.

"What is the matter with me, Florence ? I feel so stupid."

"Miss Lenox fainted. That is all. One's first *affaire*

always excites one unduly. Miss Lenox had better try to go to sleep."

Jeanne turned her face wearily to the wall. Yes, she would like to sleep. It seemed pleasant to think of going to sleep and forgetting.

The maid placed the tall Japanese screen between the foot of the bed and the window. She would not be needed for some hours, she felt quite sure. In the meantime, perhaps there had been some developments at the studio. The janitor was under a promise to keep her "posted." She would go back to him.

Jeanne sobbed herself to sleep. No tears would come to cool her hot dry lids as long as Florence was in the room, but as soon as she found herself quite alone, the pent-up torrent broke forth with plebeian violence.

But all her tears had been shed, and all her bitterness exhausted, and she was sleeping like a little tired child when Miss Hildah came limping into the room, her cane punctuating her progress audibly. She came over to Jeanne's bedside and looked at her wonderingly.

"Was the child sick, and never a word to her about it? She was made of precious small importance in this world, of none to Jeanne lately—"

"Jeanne!"

Jeanne started up in affright. The room was almost dark. Miss Hildah was standing over her, looking fretful. Was there any more trouble for her to hear about?

"Are you sick, Jeanne?"

"No"—she began winding her disordered hair around her head—"no, I'm not sick, Aunt Hildah."

"You look like it. Your cheeks are fiery red. I do believe you have fever. Let me see your tongue."

"I am not sick, Aunt Hildah, and I do not care to show you my tongue."

"Well, well, don't get snappish. There is a person here, Jeanne, who wants to see you. She says she wants to see you very much, on particular business."

"Did she send in her card?"

"No. She says you don't know her, but she begs you will not refuse to see her."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes. Jansen showed her into the parlor. I should say she was a lady, in spite of her extremely plain dress. Begging for some charity, I suppose. Shall I tell her you are sick?"

"But I am not sick; and I think I should rather enjoy hearing about poor people and miserable people, just now, Aunt Hildah. Send her in here, please."

"Enjoy hearing about poor and miserable people! Jeanne Lenox, you are enough to make one a convert to the theory of original depravity."

Miss Hildah thumped out of the room, and Jeanne, getting off the bed, completed the coiling of her hair just as the door opened to admit her visitor.

Miss Hildah had opened it without ceremony, and, over the strange woman's shoulders, was casting a severely warning look at Jeanne:

"I have told the lady, Jeanne, that we have so many calls on us from our own church that we rarely step aside for strangers."

"Yes, Aunt Hildah, but I will make my own statements, if you please."

Her visitor was throwing back the hood to her waterproof, which she had drawn over her bonnet to protect

it from the dry, powdery snow. She was looking at Jeanne with a strange intensity. She felt quite sure that the child had been shedding many and bitter tears.

"My dear," she said, "I have come here begging, but it is not for any church charity. I have come here to beg your pardon, and—if possible—to right a great wrong I have helped to do you."

"I—don't understand you. Who are you?"

The black waterproof lay on the back of a chair now, and there stood revealed to Jeanne's eyes a majestic-looking woman, whose grave eyes were resting upon her with a sort of wistful pity.

"I am Marianne Mackaye, Randall Mackaye's wife. And I want to be your friend."

Jeanne put out a hand suddenly towards the mantel-piece. She needed something to lean upon. But her slight form was drawn to its upmost height, and her pretty face was turned defiantly upon Marianne.

"Did your husband send you here, Mrs. Mackaye, to plead for him, the impostor? Has he told you how he won the friendship of Jerome Lenox and his daughter?"

Marianne held up her hand commandingly.

"I think you must let me make things a little clearer, Miss Lenox. Then you will see that I came here of my own accord with the earnest desire to serve you. He does not know I am here."

"To serve me!"

"To serve you. Sit down, my child. I have suffered too much myself not to recognize the signs of it in others. I will not detain you long."

Jeanne sat down in a strangely docile mood. There

was something inexpressibly soothing in this woman's low, cultured voice, something imposing in her quiet self-possession.

"You imagine, do you not, my dear, that the world, all your world, will soon be wagging its head over Jeanne Lenox's folly. You imagine how the story of your giving your first girl's fancy (only a fancy, dear !) to a married man——" Here she was fiercely interrupted.

"He is a wretch ! Don't mention his name in my presence. I hate him ! Oh, how I loathe him !"

"I do not intend to insult you by mentioning his name any oftener than is needful. It is only because I feel largely responsible for your trouble that I dared come to you. I am here for your good, and yours alone. Miss Lenox, please believe that, and hear me quietly to the end."

Jeanne's breast was heaving tumultuously, but she made a gesture for Marianne to proceed.

"When I went away from my husband, with a view to testing his ability for earnest effort, it was because the wealthy patrons of art here in the city were beginning to notice him, and I imagined I was a drag on his ambition. Indeed, he told me so. I was not far-seeing enough to calculate some of the evil possibilities of giving him his liberty. He had never been what is called a lady's man. In fact, I think I knew he was too self-absorbed ever to form a deep attachment for any woman. I believed he wanted his freedom as an artist, and I gave it to him. But that his handsome face and smooth ways might ever prove a snare to others I had never thought, or, if I did, I put it away from me

as the foolish fancy of a jealous woman. For that result of my blindness I am here to beg your pardon and to make reparation.

“What reparation can you make?” Jeanne asked, bitterly.

Marianne looked at her with a wistful smile.

“My dear, you have already found out that the only wound is to your pride.”

“Yes—I have; but that wound——”

“Is the one I am here to heal.”

“Then be quick about it. I am smarting at every pore. I will die of the shame of it.”

“What church do you attend?” Marianne asked, abruptly.

Jeanne, wondering more and more at her own docility throughout this strange interview, gave the name and location of her church.

“It is a large and a fashionable one?”

“Yes.”

“Your pew conspicuous?”

“Yes.”

“Then, my dear, I wish to accompany you to church to-morrow.”

Jeanne started and colored violently.

“Do not be afraid that you will ever have to recognize me afterwards,” said Marianne, proudly; “but here is a paragraph I wish to have inserted in a society column on Monday. All the world, your world, will read it; and all the world, your world, will wag its wise head and say, ‘We must have made a mistake—there is nothing wrong there.’ It will be a disappointment to them, for doubtless they think just now that they

have an unusually sweet morsel to roll under their tongues. ”

“I wish I might know you—have you for a friend. You must be strong, and good, and unselfish, or you never would have thought of sheltering me. For I am wicked—desperately wicked. ”

Marianne smiled down upon the troubled child with a sort of wistful tenderness. She was so young and unsheltered.

“My dear, ” she said, “if a little white dove, who had been robbed of its brooding mother, should tumble ignorantly from its soft nest into the mud and the mire of the roadside and soil its pretty wings, would you pass by on the other side and call that little white dove a desperately wicked thing? ”

Jeanne put out both hands impulsively.

“If I were like you, ” she said, “I suppose I would pick the silly thing up, smooth its soiled plumage, and put it back in its nest. ”

Tears were shining in her eyes. Marianne, drawing her close within the shelter of her arms, laid the tired young head on her shoulder.

“And that is just what I want to do, my dear. It is only the plumage that is soiled, and mine be the hand to smooth it. ”

It was a strange scene, but one upon which the angels must have smiled.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DR. MILBANK, obeying a summons from Mrs. Chiltern, who was afraid "Maria's sore throat was developing diphtheretic features," found the five ladies, who constituted what Dolly had irreverently called his "Home Guard," in a tremendous flutter about something.

Maria's sore throat was almost lost sight of entirely, and the doctor made his examination amidst a pleasant chatter of women's tongues. He was pelted with bits of information from five different points of the compass at once. Mrs. Chiltern led off by right of seniority and acknowledged leadership :

"A letter from Adolphus, Doctor. They are turning their faces homeward."

"Coming on the *Umbria*."

"And Mrs. Mackaye is coming with them. Jeanne says she is the best-known lady artist in Florence."

"Poor Mrs. Mackaye ! Dolly says she persistently refused to appear in society at first, but you know he has been dead quite two years now."

"No !" Maria's tongue was just loosed from the bondage Dr. Milbank had been holding it in for professional purposes. "Two years next month." Maria prided herself on always being accurate. "Don't you know, it was the very day after Dolly and Jeanne were married that we read in the papers about his being

killed in a runaway accident, and we all said, 'How shocking' ? "

" And, Doctor, you have gotten us into business."

Dr. Milbank looked at Mrs. Chiltern with polite curiosity.

His fancy had travelled half-way across the ocean during Maria's lucid setting of everybody right, chronologically. It had flown to meet and to greet Marianne on her homeward way.

" I hope I haven't got you into a troublesome sort of business," he said, smiling at Mrs. Chiltern.

" Oh, dear, no. You know, if we do adore anything it is spending other people's money for them. But I mean, since we wrote Dolly and Jeanne about how beautifully *we* had furnished your house for you, they seemed to think we have gone into the upholstering business permanently, and now they want us to furnish another house."

" For them ? I thought they were going to live with Mr. Lenox."

" For them ? no indeed. Mr. Lenox told Adolphus, when he gave Jeanne to him, that if he took her away from him he should commit suicide. But—you know, Doctor, Jeanne, my daughter-in-law, is simply wrapped up in Mrs. Mackaye."

" Naturally," said John Milbank, while a warm glow suddenly suffused his fine face.

" As you say, naturally. The way that poor woman, suffering and smarting as she must have been herself, sheltered Jeanne from the faintest whisper of calumny was beautiful."

" Beautiful ! " was echoed four times, softly.

“Why, she actually made the gossips feel silly. She is a grand woman, Dr. Milbank. I wish you knew her.”

“Perhaps I shall some day,” said the doctor, with an inscrutable smile. “But we are getting a long way from the upholstery business, aren’t we?”

“Miles!” said Maria, in a thick voice.

“Well, it is just this. Jeanne and Adolphus are resolved on doing a very pretty thing. And there’s no reason why they should not. Mr. Lenox knows about it, and he wants to bear the entire expense, but that would not be fair to Adolphus.”

“Not at all fair,” the well-trained chorus echoed.

“They want us to find an apartment, and, dear me! that is a trouble. It must be in a fashionable part of town; have splendid light for Mrs. Mackaye to paint by; and must not be too large, for she will be by herself, excepting for servants.

“I should think her father would want to live with her.”

“Father?”

“Has she a father?”

“How did you know, Doctor.”

“Where is he now?”

“Who was she, Doctor?”

Dr. Milbank for once fully appreciated the tutelage to which Dolly had spent a life apprenticeship. It was dreadful to have to account for a careless remark to five different women.

“I’m sure I don’t know—anything at all. I just imagined, I suppose, that she might have a father. Go on, my dear Mrs. Chiltern; I am deeply interested in this pretty little scheme of Dolly’s and his wife’s.”

“Well—after we have found the impossible and se-

cured the unattainable, we are to furnish it according to our united tastes, without regard to cost."

"That is the nicest part of all. I adore poking around in carpet stores."

"And buying silver."

"And bric-a-brac."

"Only she is an artist."

"And may have views of her own."

John Milbank was quite sure that the woman for whom this pretty surprise was to be prepared had views of her own. He sat caressing his close-cropped mutton-chops absently while the discussion raged about him.

"How long a time to do all this in?" he asked, suddenly waking up again.

"Three miserable little weeks."

"That is short."

"Short! It is no time at all."

"Suppose I were to tell you that I believe I know of an apartment which would suit your friend in every particular—that is, perhaps; and that, as I would like to accommodate the owner, I should esteem it a personal favor if you held this matter in abeyance until she has examined these rooms."

"Can we see them? Are they newly furnished?"

"They are newly furnished and rather pretty. But as for your seeing them at present, I can't say. The proprietor of the house occupies the parlor floor. The suite I speak of is up one flight. I should think it embodied everything a lady would want, and if Mrs. Chiltern approves I could send her word when the rooms could be seen."

Suddenly a bright idea struck him. It would be ab-

solutely necessary to take one woman into his confidence.

“My coupé is at the door; suppose you let me drive you there now, Mrs. Chiltern. It may save all of you ladies a world of trouble.”

All five of them would have liked immensely to go on this tour of inspection, but as the coupé would only hold two, and the doctor had distinctly invited Mrs. Chiltern, the other four would have to bide their time.

Mrs. Chiltern was gone about an hour. When she came back there was a suppressed excitement about her which it was impossible not to notice.

“Will they suit?”

“To perfection! They are superb.”

“And you have taken them?”

“Subject to Mrs. Mackaye’s approval,” said Mrs. Chiltern, her eyes dancing in the most remarkable manner.

“When can we see them?”

“Not until she comes. The proprietor is rather a peculiar man, and seems to object to having the carpets trampled over unnecessarily. And I don’t blame him, for they are beautiful and delicate in the extreme. Maria, the doctor says you are not to stir out of the house for the next ten days. My dear girls, now that this task has been providentially taken out of our hands, we must give our attention to the reception for Jeanne and Dolly. Of course, all the Rockwoods and the Fosters and the Verplanks must be invited. One of you take your pencil and tablet, and the rest of you help me to think.”

Three weeks, after all, is a very small slice taken out of the year, but it seemed to Dr. Milbank that an unusually long period of time had elapsed between that morning call of his at Mrs. Chiltern's and the moment when his man announced to him that there were two ladies come to look at the suite of rooms upstairs.

Then for half a second he fell to trembling like a boy caught at a naughty trick. But Mrs. Chiltern had approved, and Mrs. Chiltern would make it all right.

He could hear them walking softly about upstairs. With a nervous little laugh he flung his head back defiantly, and, leaving his own parlor, sprang lightly up the stairs and opened the door to the suite. They had just reached the little alcove. Her hand was upon the blue-velvet portiere. She drew it back, and then leaned forward with an audible exclamation. Randall's masterpiece was there before her.

"I—don't understand—what is this?"

She turned her puzzled face over her shoulder. Where Mrs. Chiltern had been standing John Milbank was standing, looking down into her face, holding out his hands to her, just as he had held them out to her on Tea Island, before—he knew.

"I have been tricked—decoyed. Where am I? What does this mean?" She pointed to the statue.

She could see Mrs. Chiltern's form silhouetted against the windows of the parlor which she had just been expending her lavish encomiums upon. Three long rooms were between them. Close at hand stood the only man she had ever really and understandingly loved, and he was protesting, explaining, pleading, all in a voice of such intense earnestness that she thrilled at the sweet-

ness of it, and turned her face from him that he might not read it too easily.

“But this?”

She pointed to the alcove where Love’s Young Dream stood upon its pedestal.

“I could not let it pass into profane hands, my love. It has been enshrined there almost as long as you have been enshrined in my heart. When I brought it here it was with no thought of this moment ever becoming possible, Marianne. You believe that, do you not? I said to my heart, that no other woman could ever reign in it, and the cold marble that reproduced your features, my dear, gave me more pleasure than any other woman of flesh and blood could do. But now, this is my home, Marianne, and I ask you to enter in as its mistress and my wife.”

She put her hand in his very gently. There was no confusion, no awkwardness, no reservations. Each knew that he and she had come into their own.

“Do you think you will take the suite, Mrs. Mackaye?” Mrs. Chiltern was no bungler. She had timed them accurately. She stood now looking innocently into Marianne’s face.

“Provided——”

Dr. Milbank gave eager heed.

“That there is a room for father. I came back to take care of him.”

“We have thought of that too, haven’t we, Doctor? And now that this house business is off my hands, we may as well drive home and dress for dinner.”

“I am not such a careless householder as you would

make me out," said John Milbank, with a fleeting smile. "It is usual to fix dates for occupation."

"Tell him two weeks from to-day, my dear. It is your only safeguard. I have known him for thirteen years, and I never knew him to yield a point."

But Marianne had "views of her own," and it was not until she had told Dr. Milbank every particular of that lonely escape from Tea Island, and of her own ignorance of the danger she had involved herself and him in, that she consented to fix the date for their marriage.

THE END

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